

MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME

Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995),

1. Meeting Jesus Again

IMAGES OF JESUS AND IMAGES OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

MEETING JESUS AGAIN: MY OWN STORY

Childhood

Adolescence

College

Seminary and Beyond

How I See Jesus Now

THE PRE-EASTER AND THE POST-EASTER JESUS

BEYOND BELIEF TO RELATIONSHIP

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THE PRE-EASTER JESUS

FROM THE GOSPELS TO JESUS

THE JEWISHNESS OF JESUS

STORIES OF JESUS' BIRTH

JESUS' SOCIALIZATION AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

Background of Jesus: Jesus was probably born very near the end of the reign of Herod the Great, and therefore, shortly before 4 B.C. His parents were Jewish, and their names were Mary and Joseph. He may have been the firstborn, though this is not certain. He had four brothers and an unknown number of sisters, all presumably children of Joseph and Mary. Joseph probably died before Jesus' activity began (Borg P. 25).

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, in the hill country of southern Galilee, about a hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Population estimates for Nazareth vary widely, from two hundred to two thousand people. Nazareth was less than four miles from the city of Sepphoris, whose population of forty thousand made it the largest in Galilee. Sepphoris had been destroyed by the Romans as they were quelling a rebellion that arose when Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Rebuilt during Jesus' youth, it was quite cosmopolitan. (Borg P. 25).

Jesus' environment was considerably more cosmopolitan than we have typically imagined. It is clear that Galilee was not a bucolic rural backwater. In addition to Sepphoris, there were four other cities within about fifteen miles of Nazareth. Trade with other parts of the Mediterranean world was extensive, and foreign goods such as beer imported from Egypt were available. The area contained a considerable number of Gentiles, and the Greek language was widely used. It is possible that many or most Jews were bilingual, speaking both Aramaic and Greek. And, of course, the whole of Palestine was under Gentile control. Since 63 B.C., it had been part of the Roman Empire, ruled by "client kings" appointed by Rome (Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 26).

It is likely that Jesus went to school in the synagogue in Nazareth. He probably became a woodworker (in Greek, *tekton*). The word *tekton* had been translated as, but had a meaning different from, our word *carpenter* – that is, one who works on wooden buildings. A *tekton* made wood products; doors, door frames, roof beams, furniture, cabinets, boxes, even yokes and plows. In terms of social standing, a *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who still owned a small piece of land. A *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land (Borg P. 26).

THE ADULT JESUS: A SKETCH

Two Negative Claims

Four Positive Strokes

Some Impression of Jesus

JESUS AS SPIRIT PERSON AND MEDIATOR OF THE SACRED IMPLICATION FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

1. Jesus, Compassion, and Politics

Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995),

THE MEANING OF COMPASSION

According to Marcus Borg, in Hebrew (as well as in Aramaic), the word usually translated as "compassion" is the plural of a noun that in its singular form means "womb." In the Hebrew Bible, *compassion* is both a feeling and a way of being that flows out of that feeling. Sometimes it is very specifically linked to its association with *womb*: a woman feels compassion for the child of her own womb; a man feels compassion for his brother, who comes from the same womb. 47 As a feeling, compassion is located in a certain part of the body – namely, in the loins. In women, as one would expect, this means in the womb; in men, in the bowels (Borg. Jesus. P. 47).

Borg claims that in terms of feeling, *compassion* means "to feel with," as even the etymology of the English word suggests: "*Passion*" comes from the Latin word that means "to feel," and the prefix "*com*" means "with." **Compassion** thus means feeling the

feeling of somebody else in a visceral way, at a level somewhere below the level of the head; most commonly compassion is associated with feeling the suffering of somebody else and being moved by that suffering to do something. That is, the feeling of compassion leads to being compassionate. Quite often the Hebrew words for *compassion* and *compassionate* are translated into English as *mercy* and *merciful*. But compassion is quite different from mercy, and being compassionate quite different from being merciful. In English, *mercy* and *merciful* most commonly imply a superior in relationship to a subordinate, and also a situation of wrongdoing: One is merciful toward somebody to whom one has the right (or power) to act otherwise. *Compassion* suggests something else. Some scholar (William Blake) suggests that *mercy* wears a human face, and *compassion* a human heart.

오레곤 주립대학 교수 Borg 에 의하면 compassion 은 누구와 더불어 같은 느낌을 느낀다는 뜻인데 Passion 이란 말은 라틴어에서 왔는데 이는 느끼다 (to feel) 이란 뜻이고 그 앞의 Com 은 “더불어(with)” 라는 뜻으로서 compassion 은 다른 사람의 아픔을 함께 뱃속에서 느껴서 그 아픈 사람을 위해 무엇인가 하지않고서는 견딜 수 없는 그런 감정을 의미한다. 흔히 히브리 말 compassion 이 영어로 mercy(자비)로 해석이 되었는데 compassion 은 mercy 의 의미와는 다르다. 영어의 mercy 는 우월한 관계에서 하급사람에 대한 감정을 의미하는데 누가 누구에게 자비/공휼을 느낄 때는 흔히 그가 권리나 힘을 가진사람의 입장에 있게 된다. 그러나 compassion 은 다르다. “자비”는 인간의 얼굴을 가졌으나 compassion 은 인간의 심장을 가졌다고 말한다.¹ 그는 이어 하나님의 속성은 compassion 이다. 하나님이 compassion 하다고 말하는 것은 곧 하나님은 자궁과 같다고 말하는 것이나 다름없다. 즉 자궁과 같이 하나님은 우리에게 생명을 주신다. 이는 마치 어머니가 우리를 낳아주시는 것처럼. 마치 어머니가 자신이 낳은 자식을 사랑하고 자식에게 compassion 을 느끼는 것 처럼 하나님도 우리를 사랑하시고 compassion 을 느끼신다. 자궁과 같다는 의미에서 compassion 은 생명을 낳는다, 기른다, 돌본다, 안는다 는 뜻의 뉴앙스를 가진다.²

COMPASSION, GOD, AND ETHICS

For Jesus *compassion* was the central quality of God and the central moral quality of a life centered in God.

In Luke 6:36

Jesus’ statement “Be compassionate, just as *God is compassionate*” is rooted in the Jewish tradition. To say “God is compassionate” is to say that God is “like a womb,” is “womb-like.” It means that like a womb, God is the one who gives birth to us – the mother who gives birth to us. As a mother loves the children of her womb and feels for the children of her womb, so God loves us and feels for us, for all of her children.

¹ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 47.

² Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 48.

In its sense of “like womb” *compassionate* has nuances of giving life, nourishing, caring, perhaps embracing and encompassing. For Jesus, this is what God is like ((Borg. Jesus. P. 48).

To complete the *imitation dei*, to “be compassionate as God is compassionate” is to be like a womb as God is like a womb. It is to feel as God feels and to act as God acts; in a life-giving and nourishing way ((Borg. Jesus. P. 48).

COMPASSION, SOCIAL WORLD, AND POLITICS

Though compassions the content of Jesus’ *imitation dei* was rooted in the Jewish tradition, it was not the dominant *imitatio dei* of the first-century Jewish social world. Instead, a different *imitation dei*, also grounded in the Hebrew Bible, had become the primary paradigm shaping the Jewish social world: “By holy as God is holy” ((Borg. Jesus. P. 49).

It is in the conflict between these two *imitation deis* –between holiness and compassion as qualities of God to be embodied in community – that we see the central conflict in the ministry of Jesus: between two different social visions. **The dominant social vision was centered in holiness; the alternative social vision of Jesus was centered in compassion** (Borg. Jesus. P. 49).

For Jesus, compassion was more than a quality of God and an individual virtue: **it was a social paradigm, the core value for life in community.** To put it boldly: **compassion for Jesus was political. He directly and repeatedly challenged the dominant sociopolitical paradigm of his social world** and advocated instead what might called a *politics of compassion*. This conflict and this social vision continue to have striking implication for the life of the church today ((Borg. Jesus. P. 49).

The temple was also the center of the ruling elites among the Jewish people. Not only were the high priestly families the religious elite, but they overlapped the economic and political elites, being linked with them by frequent intermarriage and other associations. Thus the politics of purity was to some extent the ideology of the dominant elites – religious, political, and economic ((Borg. Jesus. P. 53).

Jesus’ Attack Upon the Purity System

It is in the context of a purity system that created a world with sharp social boundaries between pure and impure, righteous and sinner, whole and not whole, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, that we can see the sociopolitical significance of compassion. In the message and activity of Jesus, we see an alternative social vision; a community shaped not by the ethos and politics of purity, but by the ethos and politics of compassion. It is striking that “Be compassionate as God is compassionate” so closely echoes “Be holy as God is holy,” that Jesus deliberately replaced the core value of purity with compassion.

Compassion, not holiness, is the dominant quality of God, is therefore to be the ethos of the community that mirrors God. ³

Many of Jesus' sayings indicted the purity system. He criticized a system that emphasized tithing and neglected justice: "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God" (Luke 11: 42). He called the Pharisees "unmasked graves which people walk over without knowing it" (Luke 11:44). Jesus spoke of purity as one the inside and not on the outside: "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile (Mark 7:15). To say that purity is matter of what is inside is radically to subvert a purity system constituted by external boundaries. ⁴

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often interpreted as a message about being a helpful neighbor, but in fact it had a much more pointed meaning in the first-century Jewish social world. It was a critique of a way of life ordered around purity. It was purity issue: the priest and Levite were obligated to maintain a certain level of purity; contact with death was a source of major impurity; and the wounded man is described as "half-dead," suggesting that one couldn't tell whether he was dead without coming close enough to incur impurity if he was. Thus the priest and Levite passed by out of observance of the purity laws. The Samaritan, (who was impure according to the purity system), on the other hand, is described as the one who acted "compassionately." Thus this beloved and often domesticated parable was originally a pointed attack on the purity system and an advocacy of another way: compassion.⁵ ((Borg. Jesus. P. 55).

The stories of his healings shatter the purity boundaries of his social world. He touched lepers and hemorrhaging woman. He entered a graveyard inhabited by a man with a "legion" of unclean spirits who lived in the vicinity of pigs, which were of course unclean animals. In the last week of his life, according to the synoptic gospels, he brought his challenge to the center of the purity system – the temple – with his action of driving out the money changers and the sellers of sacrificial animals. His charge that the temple authorities had turned the temple into a "den of robbers" may very well refer to the economic interest that the temple elites had in the purity system ((Borg. Jesus. P. 55).

"Table fellowship" – sharing a meal with somebody – had a significance in Jesus' social world. Sharing a meal represented mutual acceptance. More specifically, rules surrounding meals were deeply embedded in the purity system. Those rules governed not only what might be eaten and how it should be prepared, but also with whom one might eat. Pharisees would not eat with somebody who was impure, and no decent person would share a meal with an outcast ((Borg. Jesus. P. 55).

The meal practice of Jesus had sociopolitical significance. He frequently ate with outcasts, as well as with others. His practice of "open commensality" incited criticism from the advocates of the purity system; Jesus was accused of "eating with tax collectors

³ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 53.

⁴ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 54.

⁵ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 54.

and sinners” and is charged with being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Tax collectors were among the worst of the untouchables, and *sinner*s should be given the meaning it had with a purity system; impure people, “dirty people. The open table fellowship of Jesus was thus perceived as a challenge to the purity system. And it was: The meals of Jesus embodied his alternative vision of an inclusive community. The ethos of compassion led to an inclusive table fellowship, just as the ethos of purity led to a closed (exclusive) table fellowship ((Borg. Jesus. P. 56).

(Eucharist) Ultimately the meals of Jesus are the ancestor of the Christian Eucharist. The centrality of meals in the early Christian movement and throughout Christian history goes back to the table fellowship of Jesus. In the Christian tradition, of course, the meal has become a ritualized sacred meal, no longer a real meal. But for Jesus, these were real meals with real outcasts ((Borg. Jesus. P. 56). Recognizing the importance and practice of Jesus’ meal with those who are excluded makes me think of our contemporary Eucharist ritual which often requires baptism to qualify to participate in the meal. I think it is very wrong although it is by-law of some denominations. Jesus would not excluded those who are not baptized. Eucharist must welcome everyone who are willing to participate. Homeless, drug/alcohol addicts and street people must be included in Eucharist. The by-laws that qualifies only those baptized to participate in Eucharist in today’s Christian church is closer to the Jewish purity system rather than to Jesus Christ.

The inclusive vision incarnated in Jesus’ table fellowship is reflected in the shape of the Jesus movement itself. It was an inclusive movement, negating the boundaries of the purity system. It included women, untouchables, the poor, the maimed, and the marginalized, as well as some people of stature who found his vision attractive. In a society ordered by a purity system, the inclusiveness of Jesus movement embodied a radically alternative social vision ((Borg. Jesus. P. 56).

Women: Within the Jewish social world, women were nobodies. The dominant voice within Judaism disenfranchised women. They had few of the rights of men. They could not, for example, be witness in a court of law or initiate a divorce. They were not to be taught the Torah (perhaps because the ability to interpret Torah was considered a form of power). They were radically separated from men in public life, almost invisible. Respectable women did not go out of the house unescorted by a family member; adult women were to be veiled in public. Meals outside of the family were always mail-only affairs. Women were the victims of male projections; ((Borg. Jesus. P. 57).

In this setting, the role of women in the Jesus movement is striking. The stories of Jesus’ interaction with women are remarkable. They range from his defense of the woman who outraged an all-male banquet not only by entering it but also by (unveiled and with hair unbraided) washing his feet with her hair, to his being hosted by Mary and Martha and affirming Mary’s role as disciple, to his learning from a Syro-Phoenician Gentile woman (Luke 7:36-50).

Women were apparently part of the itinerant group traveling with Jesus. They were among his most devoted followers, as the stories of their presence at his death suggest.

The movement itself was financially supported by some wealthy women. The evidence is compelling that women played leadership roles in the post-Easter community ((Borg. Jesus. ⁶

It does point to [the radical social reality](#) constituted by the Jesus movement in first-century Palestine. Within the movement itself, the sharp boundaries of the social world were subverted and [an alternative vision](#) affirmed and embodied. It was a “discipleship of equals” embodying “the egalitarian praxis” of Jesus vision ((Borg. Jesus. P. 57).

The inclusiveness of the Jesus movement continued into the early Christian movement. The famous words of [Paul also negate the world of purity](#) and cultural boundaries and express the same inclusiveness: “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentiles, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28) ((Borg. Jesus. P. 58).

In short, there is something boundary shattering about the *imitatio dei* that stood at the center of Jesus’ message and activity: “Be compassionate as God is compassionate.” Whereas purity divides and excludes, compassion unites and includes. For Jesus, compassion had a radical sociopolitical meaning. In his teaching and table fellowship, and in the shape of his movement, the purity system was subverted and an alternative social vision affirmed. The politics of purity was replaced by a politics of compassion ((Borg. Jesus. P. 58).

[SPIRIT, COMPASSION, AND US](#)

The intra-Jewish battle between Jesus and the advocates of the purity system can be seen as a battle [over two different ways to interpret Scripture](#). Both he and his critics stood in the tradition of Israel and sought to be faithful to it. The elites of his day read Scripture in accordance with the [paradigm of holiness](#) as purity. Jesus read it in accordance with the [paradigm of compassion](#). It was thus a hermeneutical battle, a conflict between two very different ways of interpreting the sacred traditions of Judaism ((Borg. Jesus. P. 59).

[The same hermeneutical struggle goes on in the church today](#). In parts of the church there are groups that emphasize holiness and purity as the Christian way of life, and they draw their own sharp social boundaries between the righteous and sinners. They end up emphasizing those parts of Scripture that Jesus himself challenged and opposed. An interpretation of Scripture faithful to [Jesus](#) and the [early Christian movement](#) sees the Bible through the lens of compassion, not purity. ((Borg. Jesus. P. 59). [I can add that some churches consider the homeless “dirty” and wouldn’t allow them in the church; they feel they don’t belong to the church because they are not clean and pure.](#)

[Homosexuality \(\(Borg. Jesus. P. 59\)](#)

[It is not only in the church that the politics of purity remains alive, but also in our](#)

⁶ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 57.

culture as a whole. We have secularized version of the politics of purity. Our culture has increasingly maximized the rewards for culturally valued forms of achievement and maximized the penalties for failing to live up the those same standards, thereby generating increasingly sharp social boundaries. Moreover, the notion of purity and impurity is implicitly present in attitudes toward the poor and people with AIDS ((Borg. Jesus. P. 59).

Seeing compassion as a social paradigm has a further significance for Christians in late-twentieth-century America. Studies of our culture disclose that it is characterized by a pervasive individualism. Within this framework, compassion has become an individual rather than a political virtue. It is to be enacted by “a thousand points of light” rather than being a paradigm for public policy (Borg P. 60). This is exactly the reason why our government –federal or local – keep slashing funds for the poor and expect them to get up and walk on their own. 40% of the homeless population are working poor because they cannot afford apartment with their meager earning and there are not enough low income affordable housing either. This is the reason why homelessness for women and children are growing so rapidly .

In the midst of our modern culture, Borg suggests, it is important for those of us who would be faithful to Jesus to think and speak of a politics of compassion not only within the church but as a paradigm for shaping the political order. A politics of compassion as the paradigm for shaping our national life would produce a social system different in many ways from that generated by our recent history ((Borg. Jesus. P. 60).

Borg asserts that a politics of compassion in our time clearly implies universal health care as an immediate goal ((Borg. Jesus. P. 60). I can add many other items as the petitions I prepared show.

Jesus was a person of Spirit and a person of compassion, and the two are related. Their connection is pointed to by the same *imitation dei*. Spirit is compassionate; therefore, be compassionate (Borg. Jesus. P. 60).

Spirit and Compassion: Borg points out that there is an intrinsic connection between the boundary-shattering experience of Spirit and the boundary-shattering ethos of compassion. Spirit and compassion go together. Therefore, spiritual life and the world of the every-day are not split apart in the message and activity of Jesus. For Jesus, the relationship with the Spirit led to compassion in the world of the everyday. So also for his most influential follower, Paul uses the word *love* where Jesus used the word *compassion*. Thus when Paul, in the great “love chapter” in I Cor. 13, speaks of the greatest of the spiritual gifts as love, he is essentially saying that compassion is the primary fruit of the Spirit ((Borg. Jesus. P. 61). **This is where my experience of the Spirit of Jesus led me to compassion which led me to do mission with homeless women. For me the spirit and compassion were one.**

Borg claims that an image of the Christian life shaped by this image of Jesus would have

the same two focal points: a relationship to the Spirit of God, and the embodiment of compassion in the world of the everyday. For Jesus and Paul, life in the Spirit begins a deepening process of internal transformation whose central quality is compassion. Growth in compassion is the sign of growth in the life of the Spirit ((Borg. Jesus. P. 61).

4. **Jesus and Wisdom: Teacher of Alternative Wisdom**

TEACHER OF ALTERNATIVE WISDOM

Wisdom is one of the most important concept for an understanding of what the New Testament says about Jesus. On the one hand, Jesus was a teacher of wisdom. On the other hand, the New Testament also presents Jesus as the incarnation of divine wisdom. Basically, wisdom concerns how to life. Central to it is the notion of a way or a path, indeed two ways or paths; the wise way and the foolish way ((Borg. Jesus. P. 69).

There are two types of wisdom and two types of sages. The most common type of wisdom is **conventional wisdom**; it teachers are conventional sages. This is the mainstream wisdom of a culture, “what everybody knows,” a culture’s understandings about what is real and how to live. The second type is a **subversive** (과괴분자) and **alternative wisdom**. This wisdom questions and undermines conventional wisdom and speaks of another way, another path. It teachers are subversive sages, and they include some of the most famous figures of religious history. The wisdom of subversive sages is the wisdom of “the road less traveled.” And **so it was with Jesus**: his wisdom spoke of “the narrow way,” which led to life, and the subverted the “broad way” followed by the many, which led to destruction. Jesus spoke of subversive and alternative wisdom Jesus used aphorisms and parables in order to speak his subversive wisdom ⁷

THE HOW OF JESUS’ WISDOM TEACHING: APHORISMS AND PARABLES

Aphorisms and Parables (Borg. Jesus. P. 70-75).

THE PROBLEM: CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Conventional wisdom is the dominant consciousness of any culture. It is culture’s most taken-for-granted understandings about the way things are (its world view, or image of reality) and about the way to live (its ethos, or way of life). It is “what everybody knows” – the world that everybody is socialized into through the process of growing up. It is a culture’s social construction of reality and the internalization of that construction within the psyche of the individual. Conventional wisdom was the dominant consciousness of the first-century Jewish social world, but also is the dominant consciousness in our time and culture (Borg. Jesus. P. 75). 1). Conventional wisdom provides guidance about how to live 2). it is based upon the dynamic of rewards and punishments. You reap what you sow; follow this way and all will go well; you get what you deserve; the righteous will prosper. It becomes a matter of requirement and reward, failure and punishment (Borg.

⁷ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 70.

Jesus. P. 76). 3). Conventional wisdom has both social and psychological consequences. Socially, it creates a world of hierarchies and boundaries (Borg. Jesus. P. 76).

Life in this world is a life of bondage to the dominant culture, in which we become automatic cultural persons, responding automatically to the dictates of culture. It is a life of limited vision and blindness, in which we see what our culture conditions us to see and pay attention to what our culture says is worth paying attention to. It is a world of judgment; I judge myself and others by how well I and they measure up (Borg. Jesus. P. 77).

There is an image of God that goes with the world of conventional wisdom, in which God is imaged primarily as lawgiver and judge. God becomes the one whom we must satisfy, the one whose requirements must be met. When this happens in the Christian tradition, it leads to an image of the Christian life as a life of requirements. This happens so frequently that it is the most common form of Christianity. We should not make a mistake in equating conventional wisdom with Judaism and alternative wisdom with Christianity. It is very common for Christians and some scholars to identify Judaism with a religion of law and image of God as wrathful and judgmental, in contrast to Christianity, which is seen as a religion of grace, with an image of God as forgiving and loving. Borg points out two things wrong with this identification. **First**, it is historically inaccurate and radically unfair to Judaism. There were voices of alternative wisdom within Judaism. Israel began as “the alternative community of Moses” living by “an alternative consciousness,” such as in prophetic wisdom – “subversive” or “skeptical” wisdom. (Borg. Jesus. P. 78).

Second, it misses Borg’s point about conventional wisdom completely. Borg’s point is this; the conflict between conventional wisdom and alternative wisdom is not a conflict between Judaism and Christianity, but a conflict *within* both traditions. He gave his Lutheran background as an example. He suggests that when Lutheran church along with some others claim they are saved “not by works” but saved by “grace through faith.” Borg reports that this strong emphasis on grace got transformed into a new system of conventional wisdom; the emphasis was placed upon *faith* rather than grace, and faith became the new requirement. Faith (most often understood as belief) is what God required, and by a lack of faith/belief one risked the peril of eternal punishment. The requirement of faith brought with it all of the anxiety and self-preoccupation that mark life in the world of conventional wisdom. It means only the content of the requirement had changed – from *good works* to *faith* (Borg. Jesus. P. 79).

There is another consequence of Christian conventional wisdom. The requirement of faith divides the world up into those who have faith and those who don’t, with the implication that God is kindly disposed toward the first group and not so kindly disposed toward the second. This gives the message that other people are not forgiven and Christians have done something that merits forgiveness. So there is divisiveness in the statement that comes out of the marriage between conventional wisdom and Christianity (Borg. Jesus. P. 79).

THE WHAT OF JESUS' WISDOM TEACHING: SUBVERSIVE AND ALTERNATIVE WISDOM

Paradox and Reversal

Jesus often used the language of [paradox and reversal to shatter the conventional wisdom of his time](#). Jesus announced [Samaritan](#) – a heretic and impure person – can be “good person” and Pharisees – typically viewed as righteous and pure – can be pronounced unrighteous and an outcast can be accepted. So Jesus frequently spoke of [the Kingdom of God](#) in the language of impossible or unexpected combinations. He also compared the Kingdom with something impure by saying it is like a woman (associated with impurity) putting leaven (which is impure) into flour (Matt. 13:33). The Kingdom is for children, who in that world were nobodies; thus the Kingdom was for nobodies. Jesus also said the Kingdom is a banquet of outcasts, of nobodies. Many who expect to be in the Kingdom will not be and shut out. Moreover, the Kingdom is not somewhere else; rather it is among you, inside you, and outside you. Neither is it some time in the future, for it is here, spread out on the earth; people just do not see it (Borg. Jesus. P. 81).

Conventional Wisdom as the Broad Way

Far from seeing wealth as a blessing from God for having lived wisely, Jesus saw it as preoccupation and idolatry: “[You cannot serve God and mammon](#) (Matt. 6:24). He told stories of [people whose preoccupation with possessions caused them to miss the banquet](#) to which they had been invited, of [a farmer who spent his life gathering his goods into barns](#) and then died before he really began to live, of a rich man who day after day ignored the beggar at his gate (Luke 14:16-24). It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:25)

Jesus' Image of God

In many of his parables, Jesus invited his hearers to [see God](#) not as the judge, not as the one has requirements that must be met, not as the legitimator of conventional wisdom – but [as gracious and compassionate](#). Some of the most familiar sayings of Jesus in this regard are: *Consider the [birds of the air](#) –they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them* (Matt. 6:26); *If God [so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you](#)* (Matt. 6:30): Jesus speaks of God as one who makes “[the sun to rise on the evil and the good](#)” and as one who “[sends the rain upon the just and unjust,](#)” (Matt. 5:45); We are of greater value than many sparrows (Luke 12:8). In the story of [vineyard owner who pays all of the workers the same amount](#) regardless of how long or how hard they have worked, they hearers are invited to enter a world in which everybody receives what they need (Matt. 20: 1-). In all of his stories Jesus' image of God is different from conventional wisdom, an [image of God as gracious and compassionate](#) (Borg. Jesus. P. 83).

Prodigal son (Borg. Jesus. P. 83).

Jerusalem did not “the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:41) (P. 83).

THE WAY LESS TRAVELED

The narrow way, the way less traveled is the alternative wisdom of Jesus.

1. It is an invitation to see God as gracious and womblike rather than as the source and enforcer of the requirements, boundaries, and divisions of conventional wisdom.
2. It is an invitation to a path that leads away from the life of conventional wisdom to a life that is more and more entered in God. The alternative wisdom of Jesus sees the religious life as a deepening relationship with the Spirit of God.
3. Transformation:
4. Love your God.
5. Death: carry the cross and follow Jesus. Death is ultimate letting go.

It is a challenging message for both secular and Christian forms of conventional wisdom in our time. [Our culture's secular wisdom](#) looks to the material world for satisfaction and meaning. Its dominant values are achievement, affluence, and appearance. We live our lives in accord with these values, with both our self-worth and level of satisfaction dependent upon how well we measure up to these cultural messages (Borg. Jesus. P. 87)

Conclusion:

The path of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-preoccupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from lie centered in culture to life centered in God (Borg. Jesus. P. 88).

5. Jesus, The Wisdom of God:**SOPHIA BECOME FLESH**

Nicea Conference in the 4th century

New Testament period

WISDOM IN THE JEWISH TRADITIONTHE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Justification (Borg. Jesus. P. 104).

Paul

THE GOSPEL OF JOHNA COMPLEMENTARITY OF CHRISTOLOGICAL IMAGES**6. Images of Jesus and Images of The Christian Life**THE MACRO-STORIES OF SCRIPTURE

The Exodus Story (Borg. Jesus. P. 122-123)

It is a story of bondage, liberation, a journey, and a destination. It begins with the Hebrews as slaves in Egypt under the lordship of Pharaoh. Life in Egypt is marked by a politics of oppression, an economics of affluence, and a religion of legitimation. Though perhaps a comfortable life for members of Pharaoh's household, for those enslaved it is a life of hard labor and groaning and meager rations, with enough to survive on, but not much more. The story then moves through the plagues and the liberation itself. The word *exodus* literally means "the way out" or "the road out." But leaving Egypt is not the end of the story. Coming out from under the lordship of Pharaoh brings people into wilderness and sets them upon a journey that lasts for forty years, and the destination of the journey is the promised land, which symbolically is the place of God's presence Borg. Jesus. P. 123).

Borg would assert that we too live in Egypt, the land of bondage. We are slaves of an alien lord, the lord of Egypt, Pharaoh. He seems to refer our life to bondage as an image with both cultural-political and psychological-spiritual dimensions. He suggests us to ask "To what am I in bondage, and to what are we in bondage?" Borg. Jesus. P. 124).

Borg claim that we are in bondage to cultural messages about what we should be like and what we should pursue – messages about success, attractiveness, general roles, the good life. We are in bondage to voices from our own past, and to addictions to various kinds Borg. Jesus. P. 124).

Liberation and Journey in the Wilderness: The Pharaoh who holds us in bondage is inside of us as well as outside of us. If the problem is bondage, the solution is liberation. Liberation involves coming out of from under the lordship of Pharaoh and the lordship of culture. But liberation is not the end of the story. Rather, "the way out" leads to a journey through the wilderness. The wilderness is a place of freedom, where God is encountered and known. Yet it can also be a place of fear and anxiety, where we erect one golden calf after another, and where we sometimes find ourselves longing for the security of Egypt –for the "fleshpots" of Egypt, as the story puts it. At least there was food in Egypt. But the wilderness is also a place where we are nourished by God, by water from the rock and bread from heaven, and where God journeys with us in a pillar of cloud by day and column of fire by night. It is a journey *toward* God that is also *with* God; from the life of bondage to life in the presence of God. The Mighty hand of God can liberate us, wills our liberation and yearns for our liberation, from life in bondage to culture to life as a journeying with God Borg. Jesus. P. 125).

The Story of Exile and Return (Borg. Jesus. P. 125)

The story of exile and return is grounded in a history of experience. The exile began in 587 B.C., when, after Jerusalem and its temple were conquered and destroyed by Babylon, some of the Jewish survivors were taken into exile in Babylon some eight hundred miles away. There they lived as refugees, separated from their homeland and under conditions of oppression. The exile came to an end in 539 B.C., some fifty years after it began, when

the Babylonian empire was conquered by the Persians, whose imperial policy allowed displaced persons to return to their homelands Borg. Jesus. P. 125).

We live in a century in which millions of exiles and refugees know this experience firsthand. It is an experience of separation from all that is familiar and dear. It usually involves powerlessness and marginality, often oppression and victimization. It has psychological as well as cultural-political dimensions Borg. Jesus. P. 125).

A life of being separated from that to which one belongs, exile is often marked by grief, as in one of the psalms of exile: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1). Israel’s exile is our exile, and life in exile is marked by deep sadness and an aching loneliness. The feeling of being separated from home and longing for home runs deeply within us. It is the same longing that comes to expression in the gospel hymn “Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling to you and to me,” with its chorus, “Come home, come home. Ye are weary, come home” Borg. Jesus. P. 126).

In our lives, the experience of exile as estrangement or alienation can be felt as a flatness, a loss of connection with a center of vitality and meaning, when one day becomes very much like another and nothing has much zest. Life in exile thus has a profound existential meaning. It is living away from Zion, the place where God is present. Indeed, the exile is central in the symbolism of the Garden of Eden story in the book of Genesis. The garden – paradise – is the place of God’s presence, but we live outside of the garden, east of Eden Borg. Jesus. P. 126).

If our problem is exile, the solution is a journey of return. The invitation to return sounds throughout the second half of the book of Isaiah, spoken by a prophet; “*In the wilderness prepare the way of Yahweh, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain (Is. 40:3-4)*. Thus, like the exodus story, the story of exile and return is journey story. It images the religious life as a journey to the place where God is present, a homecoming, a journey of return. And like the exodus story, this story speaks of God aiding and assisting those who undertake the journey (Is. 40:29-30) Borg. Jesus. P. 127).

The Priestly Story (Borg. Jesus. P. 127)

JESUS AND THE MACRO-STORIES OF SCRIPTURE (Borg. Jesus. P. 128)

JESUS AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND JOURNEY (Borg. Jesus. P. 133-134)

Discipleship: As a journeying with Jesus, discipleship means being on the road with him. It means to be an itinerant, a sojourner; to have nowhere to lay one’s head, no permanent resting place. It means undertaking the journey from the life of conventional wisdom, from life in our Egypt and life in our Babylon, to the alternative wisdom of life in the Spirit. To journey with Jesus means listening to his teaching – sometimes

understanding it, sometimes not quite getting it. It can involve denying him, even betraying him.⁸

Discipleship means eating at his table and experiencing his banquet. That banquet is an inclusive banquet, including those we tend to exclude. It means being nourished by him and fed by him. Journeying with Jesus also means to be in a community, to become part of the alternative community of Jesus. Discipleship is not an individual path, but a journey in a company of disciples. It is the road less traveled, yet discipleship involves being in a community that remembers and celebrates Jesus. It is the primary role of the church.⁹

Discipleship involves becoming compassionate. “Be compassionate as God is compassionate” is the defining mark of the follower of Jesus. Compassion is the fruit of life in the Spirit and the ethos of the community of Jesus. It is a journey of transformation. It is an image of Christian life not primarily as believing or being good but as a relationship with God. That relationship does not leave us unchanged but transform us into more and more compassionate beings, “into the likeness of Christ.”¹⁰

Believing in Jesus: *Believe* did not originally mean believing a set of doctrines or teaching; in both Greek and Latin its roots mean “to give one’s heart to.” The “heart” is the self as its deepest level. *Believing*, therefore, does not consist of giving one’s mental assent to something, but involves a much deeper level of one’s self. Believing in Jesus does not mean believing doctrine 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 turned toward us, the face of God, the Lord who is also the Spirit (Borg. Jesus. P. 137).

⁸ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 135

⁹ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 136.

¹⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 136.