

Radix Fidem Curriculum

1. Introduction

Religion is the organized human expression of commitment to a deity.

You can have a lot of random individual expressions of faith, but that's not religion. Only when you organize it and share it with others does it become religion. Radix Fidem is not just a religion, but a religious study of religion itself. It is a body of ideas concerned with how we go about organizing together with others in pursuit of answering the demands of faith in Jesus Christ.

Radix Fidem is Latin for “root of faith.” While anyone is welcome to join us, this material is not aimed at growing our numbers, resources or fame. The idea here is to share the fundamental questions, and the answers on which we have settled, to encourage others to come up with their own answers. We would much rather see you accept the challenge to reexamine the roots of your own faith than rope you into our choices.

Indeed, our organization remains informal. We don't have a tax-exemption agreement with the government, so if anyone feels led to contribute, make it a personal gift to anyone who is involved. It's between you and God and the person who receives it. You'll simply have trust us that it will be put to good use. If that makes you nervous, keep your donations or give them to some other cause. We aren't in this for the money. We are seeking peace with God first; peace with others has to rest on that. We do what we do because we are convinced it pleases God, regardless whether it pleases or displeases anyone else.

We believe that faith is inherently personal, between you and God. None of us can pretend to know the right answers for anyone else called by God. However, we know that faith also demands we find ways to work with each other as much as possible. Jehovah revealed Himself through covenants, and a covenant is those issues on which we can agree and move forward in a community of faith. This study is not our covenant; that's covered separately. Rather, this is to explain how we came to our covenant. This is the assumptions behind it.

2. Foundation

We follow Christ. The primary source on Christ is the Bible. Most of us are from a Protestant background, so we use the Protestant canon. There are no English translations free of mistakes, and some are better than others, but we tend to use the New King James Version. Find your own peace with God about your choices, but that's what you'll get from us.

This Bible comes to us from a unique cultural context. If you read it from your own cultural perspective, you'll get things wrong – lots of things. Jesus was a Hebrew man; He spoke their language and His brain was organized according to their record of divine revelation. He was the Son of God, God in the flesh, but He grew up fully human like everyone of us. His upbringing included a certain range of things we can study and understand.

To discern the full impact of what that means, we owe to God and ourselves to study and understand that background. Some of it we can't fully embrace, but some of it was built by God specifically according to His own moral character and the design of revelation. It's a tall order to, as Paul said, rightly divide the Scripture and discern the difference between flavoring and the essence of holiness.

Warning up front: We tend to see a great deal of continuity between the Old and New Testaments. You'll be able to see that more clearly once we get into the details, but watch out for this as we proceed.

3. Abraham through Moses

Ask the Hebrew people and their primary ancestor is Abraham, so we'll start there.

We know he first appears as a resident of Ur. His ethnic identity is unknown, but we do know something about his cultural background. The one thing we can say for sure is that he was in the noble class, and that means a hefty education. Given where he lived and when, that means an education in the proud Mesopotamian academic traditions. Consistent across several different civilizations that arose and dominated Mesopotamia at different times is a vast library of myths from every known religion. They were experts in the human instinct for religion, and kept a catalog of various deities, where and by whom they were worshiped, and what was typical of that worship. Abraham would have been steeped in that tradition.

We know that Abraham perceived a divine call from a deity he would have called "El." Sometime shortly after, his father moved the entire clan to the opposite end of the Mesopotamian Valley, up to Haran. From there Abraham eventually set out for the Promised Land. As part of his divine call, he was forced to give up the urbane existence he had in Mesopotamia and become a tent-dwelling nomad, something generally despised by his people. The Book of Genesis follows his adventures through his lineage down to Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel by that same God who led them to that land. We are given the marvelous tale of Joseph and the move of the entire household down to the Nile Delta in Egypt.

Not much history of the area is recounted in the Bible until we get to Moses. Moses was adopted by the imperial household there in Egypt. That means he got a very strong education in Egypt's traditions. Then he spent another forty years under the tutelage of Jethro, who was a priestly chief of Midian. Who were the Midianites? Another tribal nation descendant from Abraham. What this did was restore the ancient Mesopotamian education Moses missed growing up in Pharaoh's court. So now Moses has encountered the full range of traditions for the entire Ancient Near East.

Eventually he leads Israel in the Exodus. During that trek, he spends forty days on top of a mountain in the Presence of God. During that forty days, God helps Moses sort through this massive educational background and pick out from all that mythology and lore what it was God considered important.

Looking back across this whole process from Abraham to Moses, we see that God didn't simply pick from what was available, though it did include that. Rather, the Bible reveals a process by which God steered things so that Moses stood before Him on that mountain bearing the proper combination of things God wanted in place as the context for revelation. The Nation of Israel was His chosen vessel, built up from selected elements – language, culture and intellectual traditions – that was appropriate for telling the world what He wanted humans to know about Him.

Our modern Western tendency to view Moses as an ignorant savage with a poor understanding of God is the height of blasphemous arrogance. God, by His own hand, built the Hebrew culture and language as the best way to make Himself known. If you really want

to know who God is as a Person, it should be obvious that the ancient Hebrew culture is the place to start.

4. From Conquest to Collapse

The Nation of Israel had a mission from God. They were chosen to live in such a way as to reveal that what God was offering was the best we can hope for in this fallen world.

Keep in mind the nature of this covenant. God had come as a powerful rescuer, pulling Israel out of the fire. They had been won back from Pharaoh. At the mountain, God offered them a treaty that was quite common to that time and place. He would be their emperor and they would become His vassals. He promised abundant provisions and protection if they would commit themselves to learning His ways. They agreed to it unanimously.

But they were too weak to keep up their end of the deal, so God left them sitting in the wilderness until a fresh generation grew up that had known only tents and wilderness, along with some warfare. They were able to handle anything, but kept falling short.

Don't let anyone kid you about the Canaanites. They were a threat to whole human race because of their unspeakable depravity. The world is already a fallen and nasty place, but these folks were off the scale. The Law of Moses was from God's own mouth, and He condemned these people to death. After the first flush of destroying some demonic temples and those who served in them, Israel kept backing off and not dealing with the rest. So the Lord left these morally filthy nations there to tempt Israel and keep them weak.

Things got so bad that at one point, they completely lost all copies of the Covenant for some fifty years. Old Testament history is a long sad tale of decline punctuated with a few bright moments of glory. Finally God took away the land He promised to give the descendants of Abraham. First the Northern Kingdom was hauled away, and then the Southern. But at least the southern half were determined to keep their identity as a nation.

They sat in Babylon for a while and absorbed some of the culture and mythology. They picked up this crazy notion that money was important in religion, a peculiar Babylonian idea. When the Persians came, they also thought so, but added a new troubling element. The Medo-Persian Zoroastrian religion caused them to believe that once a ruler issued a decree, even he could not rescind it. Somehow the Israelites absorbed this crazy notion and began thinking it applied to their God.

The small handful of Israelites who returned to their homeland were mostly those who weren't making it big in Babylon, and had little to lose by leaving. But they brought with them a heavy dose of materialism they didn't have before, and that crazy notion that God could not punish them because they were following the rules. About the only good lesson they learned was to stay away from blatant idolatry, but now they were suckers for a subtle form of mental idolatry. It ate away at their faithfulness. By the time Alexander the Great marched into the land, they capitulated and began absorbing his Hellenism. Hellenism was openly hostile to the ancient Hebrew culture.

Moses had been the very soul of Hebrew mysticism. For centuries the core of Hebrew culture was an otherworldly call to see through the provisions of the Covenant and embrace the faith of Abraham. By the time Christ was born, they had nearly forgotten all of that. They were so enamored with this new worldly form of logic and reason that they used it to pervert their understanding of the Word. The result was the hideous legalism we saw with the Pharisees.

In the minds of the Pharisees and their religious allies, their reason was their god. Their legalistic assumptions included the idea that God owed them because they were so wonderful. They taught that God was bound by their reasoning about His Law. Their oral traditions trumped the Old Testament writings. A great many of them never even read the Scriptures, but spent their time memorizing the rulings of previous scholars, and dreaming up new rules to pile on top. None of their heroes would have recognized this highly evolved religion; the Old Testament saints would have been horrified of what it had become.

5. *Jesus the Messiah*

When Christ began His ministry, a critical element in what He did was to call His people back to the ancient Hebrew understanding of the Covenant. A great deal of what He had to say is hard to grasp unless you understand that. Every debate He had with the Pharisees and scribes was based on this call back to what Moses actually wrote, and the cultural traditions of the ancient Hebrew nation.

If you and I don't take the time to understand this tug of war, particularly what the ancient Hebrew way of thinking was, we cannot understand Jesus the man. What had the Jews forsaken? What were the key differences between the Pharisees and the forefathers?

First and foremost is the Fall. You can call it what you like, but the entire Ancient Near East took for granted that humans were inherently broken, incapable of much good on their own. Without divine intervention, people only rarely aspired to anything of importance. Right next to this was a critically different interpretation of what was important. Conquering and building empires wasn't that important; what really mattered was lasting moral influence.

In their minds, mitigating the rotten human nature was of paramount importance. While all of these civilizations varied in how they sought for answers to this problem, they all shared a perception that the universe around them was a living thing that wasn't fallen, and that it spoke with a thousand voices on how we humans could do better. So the underlying issue was how to hear and translate those voices. There was always some very real life force out there that held the answers.

But they were deeply convinced that our sensory inputs, and our ability to reason, were totally insufficient to access those answers. They relied on some other faculty, something we could use if we chose to activate it. Within the vast range of civilizations in the Ancient Near East, virtually all of them shared this basic orientation, this fundamental assumption about reality. The Hebrew people were no different; it's quite discernible in the way the Bible was written.

So in the Bible we can detect a thread of thinking that the heart was the seat of this higher faculty. Scripture presumes you understand that your heart is a sensory organ of itself, capable of hearing those hidden voices in the universe. The books of the Old Testament counsel us to get our hearts right, to commit to God as our feudal Master and Lord. In Hebrew literature, He is the single Person behind those thousand voices of Creation calling out to us in His name. The trees clap their hands in celebration of His greatness; the mountains and the hills sing deeply His praise; the sun, moon and stars shine His glory. There is a sense in which they meant this quite literally. Your senses and mind can't pick it up, but your heart could if you chose to invest the focus of your conscious awareness there.

This is the very thing destroyed by Hellenism. Alexander's tutor from his youth, Aristotle, flatly rejected this mystical heart-led awareness. He insisted that the human intellect was superior to all other human capabilities. This was the driving force in what we now call

Aristotelian logic: To destroy the mystical awareness that had guided humanity from Eden all the way up to the time Alexander's father began building an empire his son would spread across the world.

Why did God not protect His people from this complete shift in orientation? Because they had already left behind the ancient Hebrew ways God Himself had designed for them. If they were determined to leave it, then it would flee from them first. So with the invasion of this Hellenistic approach into the Land of the Bible, the leadership of Judah not long after their return to the land, bought into this massive lie and gave birth to the materialistic legalism of the Pharisees. This is the very shift in orientation that Jesus condemned in His debates with the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus was determined by His Father's commission to rebuild the nation on those ancient Hebrew traditions. The nation had this one last chance to get it right, and they murdered Him instead. Jesus saw that coming. He warned His disciples repeatedly that this was not going to work, that the business of the Messianic Kingdom was not with the earthly nation of Israel, but would become a kingdom of hearts. He was determined to restore what His Father had given as the rich gift of redemption by a change of heart, by a heart-led commitment to the covenant God of Abraham.

6. The Church Failed

Granted, English translations don't handle this heart-led way very well. That's because the entire range of Western Civilization, and the Western Church history, quickly went off the rails on this very issue. Shortly after the death of the last Apostle, Jesus' cousin John, the leading scholars of Christian faith drifted back into the Hellenistic approach to understanding, and once again the heart of faith died out.

During three centuries of persecution, the active faith of Christians remained strong. That's how things work; if you put people under pressure, you find out what really matters to them. But all that time, the philosophical foundation of Christian faith was being hollowed out. When Roman Emperor Constantine recognized how powerful Christian faith was, he decided to court the leadership of the churches so he could use their religion to strengthen his reign. It was a death-blow. Taking away persecution and making them comfortable exposed the weakness that had been eating away at the core of their religion. They compromised, not in their cerebral doctrines, but in their commitment to the otherworldly nature of genuine faith.

This world is broken. It cannot be healed. When Christ returns, it will be destroyed. That's the poignant reminder in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, and 2 Peter 3:10-13. Do not invest too much energy in saving this world. Instead, we are to live by divine justice for as long as the Lord leaves us here, but we should be eager to get out of this world. Yes, the revelation of God can make life worth living in this world, because it is the secret of how Creation works. The Fall took away that understanding; the Fall was the choice to trust our senses and logic over the revelation of God in our hearts. The human intellect will not survive the Second Coming of Christ.

Yet following the church leaders' decision to compromise with political rulers, they began investing their energies in restructuring religion in terms of human reason. Step by step, it was that same series of mistakes Israel made in departing the ancient ways. The failure was not in faith, but in the human organization.

Every time someone stepped up to reform and restore the ancient faith, they kept trying to change the intellectual ideas and the organization, but nobody talked of restoring the heart to its role as God intended. Instead, the terminology of trusting the heart was invested with a different meaning. Such was the cultural mythology of Western Civilization, that the heart is merely a repository of sentiment, the combined influences of our environment and our individual personalities. In the Bible, the heart is the seat of conviction and faith, something that comes down from above.

Stop for a moment and consider what a difference there is between those two.

It's not that we need to mend our churches and our religions. So long as they are founded and built on any part of Western traditions, they cannot accomplish the mission of Christ. He was a heart-led man who promoted the ancient Hebrew ways of His people. He was a man of the Ancient Near East. Christianity is properly an eastern mystical religion because the Bible is an eastern mystical book. You cannot truly serve Christ from a Western orientation.

7. Restore the Heart of the Gospel

Again, we are not promoting our organization. If this presentation calls your name, the first thing you should do is spend time alone with God. Take the time to move the core of your conscious awareness from your head to your heart. Stop trusting your intellect so much, and subject your mind to the leadership of your heart. That's the same as saying learn to live by your convictions, not your reason.

We don't need another Christian denomination. Radix Fidem can provide that service, but that's not our intent. This is not a call for you to join our group and follow our rules. We see no need to seek control of the process and its outcomes. We have full confidence that God working in your heart will lead you where He wants you.

Instead of a discrete organization, we would rather see a fellowship arise, an informal association of believers who agree that we need something different from what we already have. We need more believers who live the heart-led way, regardless of all other human affiliations in their lives. We need to share our support for this different and very ancient approach to discovering and living our faith, our convictions and our commitment to Christ.

We envision a parallel society, a secret nation of hearts that cuts across all the human institutions and identities. There's nothing stopping you from starting your own organization, but our experience indicates that this requires great care and consideration. It's too easy to take things in the same directions that have already failed. We are happy to spin off all kinds of fellowships with their own names, but we warn you it won't be easy.

Instead, we would rather this remain just an informal association of private individuals who share the same driving force. It's a spiritual family identity that has no meaning to this world. We aren't even trying to influence things. What we hope to see is the rising presence of people who walk in the Covenant of Christ according to His own ideas about what it should look like. Don't join our Radix Fidem covenant unless you sense the Lord demands that of you.

Let your convictions lead you.