

Engaging Our Theological Diversity Discussion  
Notes from 8/25/21

Reflections from last discussion, especially any commonalities:

- We were all interested in the topic of theology.
- Much support for non-credal organization; we were more concerned about the here-and-now rather than the hereafter, and we approached our lives rationally and scientifically.
- All were focused on religion in this world, not the next.
- Everyone had some cause bigger than themselves, even the atheists who were pointing to bigger principles and still seeking truth.
- There was much mention of our non-credal nature and mention of the Seven Principles. I had a sense of something more than this world, but am not sure the humanists would agree, so this may be mutually exclusive. Many referred to a sense of responsibility to make things better now.
- All of us but one come from other faith traditions. I had been unaware of the conflict between those who are born-in and those who come-in and would like to engage in that discussion with more who have been born-in.
- We all seemed to prefer working together in community.
- I have a question about how the Seven Principles can be extended into a theology. Do UUs need a theology? What is the difference between a credal and a non-credal church?

Several participants were interested in discussing the T. S. Eliot comment:

How do you think the passage from T. S. Eliot on p. 18 pertains to our current situation: "In religion, Liberalism may be characterized as a progressive discarding of elements in historical Christianity.... But as its movement is controlled rather by its origin than by any goal, it loses force after a series of rejections, and with nothing left to destroy is left with nothing to uphold and with nowhere to go."

- Eliot wrote this in 1936. He had converted to Anglicism from Unitarianism in 1927 and became a British citizen.
- Some of us interpreted this as Liberalism with a capital "L" – originating with Dewey and William James, originating in Pragmatism with no ultimate transformation in mind. It seeks no ultimate goal but rather just solutions to immediate problems. Others in the group had a less formal definition of liberalism as being open to change and simply wanting to do the right thing to achieve the Beloved Community, which seems like a good goal.
- Isn't the purpose of the empty niche above our altar allowing us to put there whatever we wish?
- By 1961 Unitarian Universalism was no longer Christian, and by 1967 "race" had taken over our theology. There was movement away from Christianity in UUism before 1961. There was also a long discussion of humanism.
- Historical Christianity cannot be denied; it is a series of dates and events and the evolution of history. Theological Christianity related to differing views of the nature of god.
- I am having a hard time understanding what theology is. Is humanism a theology?
- Some people would argue that humanism is a moral issue rather than a theological one – understanding what is good and what is bad without relying on some extraterrestrial force.

- Humanism is there because we are all human. If we let things run amok, the fact that some are harmed means that all are harmed because our well-beings are linked to each other. The human instinct to take care of each other is an evolutionary response.
- The historical meaning of theology is that it is the study of god. A UU theology would explore what is behind the god theory. Since we have rejected historical Christianity, is there anything behind it? All western law comes out of deist, monotheism.
- We can discern good and bad without the scriptures.
- Theology is a worldview. Theology is to religion as theory is to practice. How can a religion (UUism) engage in any activities without a theory to determine what those actions should be?
- I think we agree on what underlies how we view the world – i.e., there is right and wrong, and we want to do what is right.
- We should use the term “philosophy” instead of “theology.” That can be broadened to many religions and allow us to move away from supernatural beliefs. The foundations of morality are rooted in many different sources, not just Christianity.
- The term philosophy doesn’t have anything to do with going to church and making commitments. The very fact that the term is generating so much energy indicates the importance of our breaking it down and understanding it.

Second topic of discussion from response to Bumbaugh by Weston: What do you think of the idea Weston learned from Clifford Geertz: “[A]ny religion worth its salt provides its adherents with two things: a worldview and an ethos.’?

- People develop their own worldview in community with other people. This becomes religious when one becomes committed to it. Monotheism is a way of saying that all people in religious community are related – a kind of relatedness.
- Religion should provide the space in which to form a world view. An ethos does not necessarily come out of a religion
- The term “worldview” seemed obviously correct at first, but on reflection I am not sure that it describes what religion does.
- UUs can have multiple world views.
- The Seven Principles support my world view of socialism. All the social justice work we have tried to help with came into Unitarian Universalism based on the ethos of the Seven Principles.
- Teleology refers to where is all this leading us. What do you have faith in? What are you willing to die – or kill – for? Is it the Beloved Community as a historical reality?
- The humanist response is – do we need a purpose?
- The purpose is to take care of each other and the earth and all its living creatures. Do we need theology to get to this?
- An adequate UU theology would consider “what are we working toward?”
- I’m not sure about teleology, but I do believe in the experience of discovering with other people our commonalities. People do get committed to their beliefs that they can act on without a commitment to a religion.
- I have a hard time thinking of a supreme being. Humans have to work together for the common good. I am still seeking.

- This discussion has made me think about podcasts I once watched on the biological foundations of morality
- I don't believe that we will ever necessarily get to the Beloved Community, but we can still work toward it.
- I have no belief in any supernatural forces or beings, but I believe we have a theology that we need to understand it. If we talk about biological foundations of this, I will have problems with that discussion and will look for articles by the late (🙄) Richard Lewontin to discuss it.

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