

Summary 6  
Engaging Our Theological Diversity  
October 27, 2021

Opening Words:

We gather this hour as people of faith  
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.  
We light this beacon of hope  
Sign of our quest for truth and meaning,  
In celebration of the life we share together. (Christine Robinson)

Reflections:

- I found JLA interesting and understandable upon re-reading. I find all the suggested questions interesting. Would like to discuss the COA question about offering oneself in worship and the Alice Wesley Blair (AWB) reference to questions answered by “God I don’t know.”
- I have been wondering why ceremonies figure so large in our celebrations. I liked the Minns lecture about covenant and faith. The cosmological angles of theology leave me in the dust. In our services I have a strong aversion to ministers donning robes, implying an authority they do not have.
- From last time am thinking about what does constitute a religious organization.
- No specific reflections but am gaining a much broader understanding of the words “religion” and “god.” That helps me see more clearly the diversity that is Unitarian-Universalism.

Discussion of question 2 from COA report: *2) COA: “If UUs do not somehow begin to reclaim the experience of offering of oneself in worship, they may well find that their theological diversity and differing interests will slowly move them further and further apart....[W]e have a chance to employ the enormous richness of our theological diversity in the service of making worship a place to learn how to be more authentic and generous in our personal and public relations and commitments. ... It is not whether we call upon the Spirit of Life or God/Goddess and see that energy operative in our lives but what we offer to life. It is not enough to want readings or sermons to inspire us; we have to be willing to be inspired, even if it might mean we have to rethink things and possibly do things differently. This doesn’t require a particular theology or theistic thinking. It requires an attitude shift from self-cherishing to a sense of openness and interdependence in our worship.” What does all this mean to you?*

- There are many other places where people need to be “willing to be inspired” like students in classes. I used to tell them “Try to get interested. You will learn something, and you will not be so miserable.” Alice Wesley Blair (AWB) says that metaphors work only when we regard similarities, not when we look at differences. I think that Unitarians look for problems – differences – and miss many issues.
- I have had the experience at First U of people dismissing anything related to me. The “trope” is key and willingness to be inspired is important.
- I am guilty of being unwilling to be inspired at dances and thus miss lots of fun.
- Emerson used “trope” to describe the power of a metaphor to open doors to insights; he did

both a literary and a religious analysis. For example, in the metaphor “my love is a red red rose,” the trope is to feel the roses and to enter into your imagination about all that you sense about them.

- There are similar connotations to many words. There are metaphors behind many common words. The beauty of a worship service is that you have to sit still and think rather than be committed to action
- You might disagree with a point, but you have to listen to it.
- “White supremacy” (ws) is a metaphor for people’s pain. It (and similar terms) are used by people who have had problems in the past that they refuse to acknowledge as pain.
  - WS is a metaphor I resent. I don’t engage in the conversations because I am looking at differences. Some things are inappropriate to use as metaphors – like the holocaust.
  - To try to identify with the similarities of the metaphor of WS and engage with it results in being manipulated
  - When the term WS is used in a service, it ceases to be a service for me and I withdraw
  - We should examine our own motives, but the users of WS don’t want to engage in debate. If you don’t believe as they do, you are banned. Therefore the discourse does not lead to doing things differently.
  - WS has been converted to a slogan which obscures all kinds of interconnections.
  - WS ideology is destroying interdependence and openness in worship. It obscures human connections that need to be developed. It is a red herring – a total distraction from what is important.

Discussion of questions 3 and 5: *What makes social action a thriving part of a congregation’s life? Do the activists think they’re carrying a load for the rest of the congregation? How does activism get to be part of the whole congregation’s approach to congregational life rather than the bailiwick of one committee? What does it take to view justice-making as part of the ministry? What’s the story here? How close is reality to the ideal? 5) First U has described itself as committed to Social Justice but few people participate - why?*

- Social action is spiritual discovery if people would take the time to talk with each other about what they have experienced.
- The last ministers never treated our social justice work as part of the church. They never mentioned it in sermons. Their attempt to be so comprehensive and the sole interpreters of reality suggested we should have only one point of view
- They recognized the experiences of a select few people.
- It has felt like the activists have carried the social justice load because of the failure of the ministers to engage in the program.
- Rev. Nina, on the other hand, never interfered with our social justice work, and she participated in much of it – the Emancipation pageant, the vigil at the mosque, the anti-klan demo in Skokie, the peace demonstration downtown. Nevertheless few congregants participated.
- There was a sense for me when we joined in the early 90’s that people were very proud of having been a target of the Red Squad but were very anxious that it never happen again.
- Our last ministers supported few things outside of BLM. They did go to Springfield to support marriage equality with some special congregants.
- There is now a totally different kind of social justice focused on identity politics.

- The scapegoating of Finley by the ministers and board – i.e., avoid anything he supports – stifled social justice activities and acted as an excuse for lack of participation.
- What would it take to view social justice as part of the church’s ministry. Ministry involves a matter of belief. The COA report contrasts projects with ministries, that are planned and supported by the entire congregation.
- Our interim minister “gets it.” But how are we to turn a social justice ministry into a reality.
- The Board can’t make up its mind what to do because so many of them view the people involved in social justice with suspicion. Our social justice ministry has withered because of the focus on neoracism
- Since we are to have neither a council nor a committee, we should have a social justice ministry! Under the direction of the Board and the senior minister.
- The pursuit of social justice by engaging people is a form of experiential learning. Young people thrive on it. This type of learning cannot be transmitted from the pulpit, although it needs to be supported from the pulpit.
- The liberatory nature of social justice work was always there, but we must now move to a higher level if we are to weather the coming storm. The Board must take up this responsibility. The Board itself must be committed to Unitarian Universalism. Is it?

Discussion of the Minns lectures: 1) p6: *“Any authentic covenant will be based on a mutually shared understanding of the patterns or laws of a **third reality**. The third reality of a covenant is, not just of the network of a language, but the whole of being. Using a metaphor taken from the realm of ecology, we UU’s have recently taken to calling this third reality “the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.” God is a shorter name for that reality greater than all, yet present in each.”*

*Do you think that UU’s understand the third reality as the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part? Are the covenants at your church based on mutually shared understanding of the patterns of laws of that or of a different 3rd reality?*

2) pp12-13: *The author lists questions for which the appropriate response is the exclamation God I don’t know! What do you think she is trying to accomplish here? What was your reaction to this section?*

- Who interprets these laws?
- We have to learn the laws by our engagement with reality. The third reality is the same force that JLA refers to and that Bumbaugh and the humanists talk about. We can’t resist the laws in the long run
- What established the validity of laws rather than common agreements?
- The laws of human behavior are rooted in the commune system that laid the basis for the subsequent history of human civilization and culture. The unfolding of that history will ultimately lead to world federation, but now those principles are trapped inside of churches
- Natural laws are ignored at our peril. We could get away with that when there were few people, but not now.
- AWB sees UUism as an experiment. It had great potential from 1961 to 1967 when the Black Power movement wrecked it. The experiment must continue, even if we have to step out of the formal framework of UUism to carry it out.

- The Seven Principles are a road map to mutual discovery. They are open-ended and never fully explained. They are being sabotaged.
- UUs have taken to calling the third reality the interdependent web, whose shorter name is God. Do UUs understand this as the third reality?
- This is what is being disrupted by the 8<sup>th</sup> principle effort. The 8<sup>th</sup> principle is about destroying the 7<sup>th</sup> principle.
- AWB's questions which she answers with "God I don't know," may have been designed to instill a little humility in us.
- But we do know partial answers to many of her questions. The questions she is raising are what a UU theology would look like – when we remove "god" from the answers to the questions. We are not allowed to dwell upon these kinds of questions. The new ministers being trained are political and do not know how to deal with such questions.
- Never has a negative political movement had such an impact on a liberal religion. This is happening because we do not know our history.
- I like ABW's conclusions: None of us can fulfill our promise as individuals without the faithfulness and loyalty of many others. Therefore, the aim of our worship services is a renewal of our sense of gratitude for and loyalty to the spirit of love which summons and creates and recreates right loyalties within us.

Closing words:

We extinguish this flame,

But not the light of truth,

The warmth of community,

Or the fire of commitment.

These we carry in our hearts until we are together again (Elizabeth Selles Jones)

Bobbi Campbell, scribe