ENGAGING OUR THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Discussion Notes 10/13/2021

Opening words:

This is the mission of our faith

To teach the fragile art of hospitality

To revere both the critical mind and the generous heart

To prove that diversity need not mean divisiveness

And to witness to all that we must hold the whole world in our hands – Wm F. Schulz

Check-in and preferences for discussion:

* A couple of Adams’ tenets for a free person’s faith jarred me again with the recognition that I haven’t replaced the Catholic theology of my youth which I have rejected.
* I have spent long hours driving since our last meeting and have muddled over many of the ideas we have discussed. I have a crisis of faith. I used to be certain that the cycles and on-going processes of nature would exist forever, even after my death. I am no longer certain of that given the way we are treating the earth. So I have a problem.
* I am interested in discussing the Seven Principles as the embodiment of our theology question. Last time I suggested that Channing was an antidote to the herd mentality of the mass media and the necessity sometimes to stand one’s ground in spite of what others think. Today we need a solid theological ground upon which to stand so as not to get carried away with bad ideas. That ground for me is the Seven Principles.
* I have thought about “God” – what it means and why the word is so difficult to introduce into conversation. At the Humanist forum Sunday I began to be able to sort out the different ways people use the term. The speaker talked about “believing in God,” which for me conjured up notions of an old man up in the sky somewhere. On the other hand, Adams’ definition of God as “the inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful existence” is an idea and process is a description that is meaningful to me and that I can identify with – not something I believe in.

Question on Seven Principles – in part: How do UU Principles function for you? Are they a source of religious convictions? Are they the embodiment of UU theology?....

* Having been immersed in UUMUAC programs on the Seven Principles, I struggle with the first principle – the inherent worth and dignity of every human person. This principle reflects the God trope because it emerges out of history. We can’t make it a creed, but we can make it a credo – this I believe. Opposing it can’t be heretical unless it is opposed for racist reasons. The Principles are my source of religious conviction, my solid rock.
* I also see the Principles not as religious conviction per se, but from a humanist conviction. They are sound enough to cover many things. They are my religious conviction as a UU; they guide me. But I am concerned about the possible changes being discussed at the denominational level.
* I don’t think of the Principles as a source, but as a derivative of underlying theology which exists somewhere. They are a code of conduct.
* Agree – I think of them as behavior guidelines to live successfully in community, but not necessarily as theology. Their basis could be theology. They do not have the resonance of the Ten Commandments which I learned in my youth, but they are standards to hold on to.
* I also see them as values that UUs have adopted and hold in common for living in the world and society. They fit with my process theology orientation. One has to have values to form the beloved community
* When I have listened to presentation on the Seven Principles, I have been amazed at all that can be drawn out of them. I also finally realized the dependence of each Principle on the one that precedes it. I think we have given the Principles short shrift.
* Yes, the principles can unlock many thoughts. For instance the inherent worth and dignity – this seems like a self-evident truth but we need to figure out where we stand on it. I have begun to identify ideology as the factor that both robs some people of their worth and dignity and also makes some of us fail to grant it.
* I equate inherent worth and dignity with the phrase “Jesus loves you” in Christian traditions. It is inherent but you may betray it – you may also come back to it.
* UU Christians believe people are born sinless and then may be corrupted by society as opposed to being born sinful. We need to ask where that dignity comes from. Its original source is the Neolithic communal culture. All were valued and given appropriate roles, and you absorbed that culture. Only in class society does inequality arise.
* In our culture there is such a wide range of groups that some groups get more dignity than others.
* Is “indignation” a violation of “dignity?” This is the source of energy that makes Unitarian Universalism special.
* Dignity comes from the creative process. Everything created – not just humans – have dignity. It is only from our perspective that humans have the most dignity. Other things – life experiences, mental illness – can cause people to lose their worth and dignity, not just ideology.
* It seems that to be a good person, one needs to be mentally healthy – but not all mental illness necessarily erodes worth and dignity.
* Narcissism, individualism, and egocentrism are ideological only – not mental illness
* Violence on our streets is partly the result of the PTS effect of exposure to violence. But this doesn’t affect everyone to the same degree, and some are able to pull out of it.

Question on JLA - James Luther Adams posits that a free person’s faith has three tenets: (1) that our ultimate dependence for being and freedom is upon a creative power and upon processes not of our own making; (2) that the commanding, sustaining, transforming reality finds its richest focus in meaningful human history, in free, cooperative effort for the common good; and (3) that the achievement of freedom in community requires the power of organization and the organization of power.  In the Postscript: The Church That Is Free, he describes the church that is free.  Do you think this definition of freedom is something that we as individuals and as a church should aspire to?

* The first and third tenets make sense to me, but not so much the second. The first supports my process theology orientation that there is a creative force that works through process. The third is that if people do not act to create structure, they will be run over by non-democratic forces. But the third is very human centric and earth centric; we do not have enough information to know what is in the rest of the universe. We presume we are #1.
* I have a problem with “creative power and process” – how it affects us. I know that we have had nothing to do with evolution. But we can only analyze what we know. There is much yet to analyze in the cosmos, but what we do know is how things affect us on earth. We deal with the facts we know, knowing that is not the end of the story. Meaningful history means that we are looking out for the welfare of all living things, but we are not now taking care of the rest of the living things.
* I lean more to the first tenet, and the third makes sense, because nothing is going to happen by itself. With respect to history, most of my life I have believed that the arc of the universe bent toward justice, but that is not apparent in this particular time.
* I find the first tenet thrilling – the cosmology part. At first I was unimpressed by #2, but now it strikes me as ethos – we are here, it is awesome, and it is best to work together for the common good. We need to get organized.
* Adams posited all three tenets. For me the creative force in the universe is dialectical materialism. It explains all I know about biology and ecology. And I am human-centric. Human beings create theology. How can we have a cosmic theology? With respect to history – and anything else – there is backward and forward motion; we are not currently in forward motion toward justice. But humans have a role influencing where we are going. Adams was one of the founders of the Independent Voters of Illinois; he walked his talk.
* “Freedom” means making decisions. The early Christian position was one of preordination, i.e., we have no choice. Freedom is a heresy.

Closing Words:

We are one, after all, you and I,

Together we suffer

Together exist

And forever will recreate one another – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin