Engaging Our Theological Diversity Discussion

11/10/2021

**CHALICE LIGHTING AND OPENING WORDS** – from Max Landau Moss. Let there be light to drive away the darkness. Let there be wisdom to shine on the unknown. Let there be love to heal our aloneness. Let each of us be a light for one another.

**Check-in/Reflections**

* I liked the readings and the many ways that writers defined “God” and reframed the laws of reality in which we function.
* My reflections recently have been on the 8th Principle and the divisions that have been revealed as a result of it.

**Question 3**: In Kowalski p7: *“[T]here is nothing supernatural about the God proposed by process thought, nothing otherworldly. God is in the cosmos, though not completely identified with the cosmos, surpassing it as the Whole exceeds the parts. In a panoply of events, God is simply the Main Event. Amid a multitude of partial and imperfect relationships, God is the one to whom all are fully and perfectly related. In a “participatory universe” where all have a role in the construction of reality, God is the one who participates in all life and every act of creation.”* Except for the Humanist Manifesto, in the readings for every meeting the idea of “God”, redefined, always comes up. What do you think is going on here? Is it necessary to deal with the idea of “God” even if using an alternative interpretation?

* In philosophy there is realism (what a thing really is) and nominalism (what it is called). A lot of this discussion about God is a naming problem. There is a reality out there, even though the “name” given to it takes on a life of its own. So many people have believed in and acted upon it that it has a lot of historical resonance. Process Theology defines the process but not what is causing it.
* I don’t like to use the term God. I prefer a descriptive term like “creative force.” I am a process theologian but differ with a lot of writers who personify the force. The creative force appreciates what is happening in the world and doesn’t intervene. As in any faith system, there will be differences of opinion among the faithful. Whatever your theology, it is important for people to have their own thoughts about God and whether there is more than chance behind creation.
* I agree with much of that; “God” is anthropomorphic. I think of it as a spirit that brings life together and is manifest through life. Process Theology thinks about the history of the Universe as continuous creation and as the way the spirit manifests itself.
* I don’t care much for the description of “God,” but I do identify with the description of the evolving process of living and non-living forms and of us as co-creators. I don’t think of landscapes as alive however. In order to be in conversation with all the people in the world who talk about God, it is important for us to have something to say and not be excluded from the conversation. Unless, of course, one is talking to a humanist, in which case one best not use the word.
* We have different groundings, but I agree with the idea of the common sense of God as an idea. I sense that everyone agrees that there is some force in the universe.
* I would draw a distinction between ontology – the belief in the way the world is – and theology – that requires a commitment to a belief. When we act on our beliefs, they become a theology. I trust people and believe in synergy, and that is what I act on.
* The understanding of the universe from Process Theology is that human beings have free will and can make choices about whether they will act to make the world better or act in anti-social ways.
* I think we need to deal with the term God because so many people in the world “believe” in God. I can identify with parts of many of the definitions we have encountered; I resonate most with Adams. But as soon as “God” is personified, I part ways with the definition. I believe that human beings are the result of long evolution in the natural world of opposing forces interacting and resulting in the formation of this incredible human animal in a dialectical sense.
* In the Bumbaugh responses it was said that a theology requires a cosmos and an ethic. I think that is what a previous comment referred to. We should not feel badly that we have disagreements and some difficulty interpreting some of this literature since theologians who spent their entire lives trying to work it out still had disagreements.
* The historical context of long social and biological evolution is important.
* I consider personification to be a way of knowing. This is why, for example, we go to plays and watch movies. Personification gives us an emotional connection to the thing, and we need a sense that what is called God is on our side. It helps explain the concept in ways we can understand. Whitehead was trying to rescue theology from dogmatism. Personification is a type of epistemology; it allows us to capture the concept and make it useful for historical work. Bringing intuition and imagination as well as reason liberates us to make an emotional connection – to help us move history forward.
* God is like a metaphor that can help us understand and give us an emotional connection
* The humanist concept doesn’t create wonderful ideas. They are stuck.

Question 4: What about evil? So far it has not been mentioned

* Evil is the absence of good. It is not a force. It is not genetic.
* Anything that diminishes the quality of humans is evil. Any stereotype is evil. Anti-social.
* This just proved my point. Anti-social is the absence of good.
* If we have free will, the creative spirit can be used for good or evil. If it damages other humans or other species, it is evil.
* In Christian theology there is sin, suffering, and death. They are not evil. Sin becomes a violation of the creative force. Suffering is what happens to people because we are fallen human beings. Death occurs when the human body cannot go forward. If each of the Seven Principles is a good, then the lack of one of them is an evil.
* Is it evil if a person follows their own path and chooses the wrong thing?
* Evil involves choosing to use the creative force for harm rather than moving things forward.
* Evil is motivated by attempts to motivate oneself over whatever else is going on – to boost self in a social context at the expense of others.
* Sometimes we make mistakes. This is not evil if it isn’t intentional, and we can make amends.
* Process Theology would say we chose the wrong thing. This is not a force in itself; it is a question of motivation. Something like genocide is pure evil. The source of what makes us good is the history of developing community. Evil is dangerous if we identify it as a thing (Satan) and therefore give it power.
* I feel evil is a force, but I can’t explain why. It seems there is an impetus for people to do cruel and malicious things to others that cannot just be explained by bad childhoods or poor parenting. This evil lands somewhere and takes root. I have only begun to develop that feeling during the last five years.
* The idea of people being born bad is ideology. We start seeing evil as outside of human control, as hard-wired or in our genes. This is called biological determinism. If evil exists outside the human experience, then it becomes something we can’t get rid of.

**Question 1**: Having read all the recommendations in the Commission on Appraisal report, what do you think the next step is for First U, for the UUA?

* We need workshops on UU theology. Race is being made into our new theology.
* UU congregations need to have people in conversation. In the UUA appreciation for diverse theological views has been diminished. The UUA is trying to adopt a “liberation theology” that they want us all to adopt.
* Liberation theology can include anti-colonialism, anti-homophobia, but to take any one of the interests and make it a centerpiece of a theology is counterproductive. To focus on the negative solidifies it in people’s minds.
* An example of this is a sermon given by our former minister on the evils of white men.
* I do not have good handle on what is going on in the UUA (but your views are important).
* We don’t have a church yet, and things are going to be stirred up by the 8th Principle. There will be no peace.
* I am struck by the statement on p 144: “There is a need for humility and understanding on all sides and by all factions. There is a need to take both the Universalist trio of faith, hope, and love and the Unitarian trio of freedom, reason, and tolerance seriously. When it comes to the latter we need to be honest with ourselves about how tolerant we actually are and what it will take to be as truly tolerant as we so frequently claim.”

**Evaluation:**

* In addition to a general sense that the discussion was worth-while, the following comments were made
* The sessions were necessary. It was a shaking out process, working through and figuring out how we are grounded for the coming rage of storm. Living without theological grounding in this time will destroy us.
* This was thinking I would not have done on my own. I enjoyed not only the readings but listening to others and getting to know you all better.
* This got me to think about things I had not thought about before. It was useful for us to use language we were not accustomed to.
* Any in depth discussion of theological ideas and allowing for people to talk about it is useful. I appreciated the Process Theology and Bumbaugh readings.
* The readings were interesting. The ideas brought up in conversation often provided material to chew on.
* Happy to have had the discussions but a little frustrated that few people participated. Therefore I’m not sure that there will be any lasting effect. Not sure where to go from here.
* Just having dealt with these ideas and been prepared to speak about them will have a lasting impact.
* The class is worth re-visiting with new people. Our church is heading for a split right down the middle.

**EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE AND CLOSING WORDS**

May the flame, which has brightened our time together,

light our paths as we go our separate ways. (Jerry Wright)

May we leave this place seeking an uncharted and freely chosen way to wholeness

Knowing we have companions along the way. (Bets Wienecke)