

Wind on the Water

A Viewsletter To Encourage
Unitarian Universalist
Theology and Spirituality

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Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the second year of *Wind on the Water*, a viewsletter of Unitarian Universalist theology and spirituality. "Theology" we define as "reflections on the meaning and purpose of life and the articulation of those reflections." (This definition comes from Diane and Michael Brown and Pat Guilbeault.) "Spirituality" we prefer not to define at all. We will point towards it by saying that there is much more to the individual human than the conscious mind and that life is, at its heart, a mystery.

These issues will contain reflections and suggestions for reflections on life, religion, and spirituality, and will, from time to time, suggest activities to

Creation

What is the act of creation like? You probably find it works as follows: You start off with some idea or purpose. You start gathering materials and ideas. You research. As you research you become overwhelmed with possibilities; your original idea no longer seems to work; you don't have any new idea that works; the whole project

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descends into chaos. You redouble your efforts, hoping to find clarity. It doesn't help. You have many patterns that partially fit, but all have problems around their edges. There is an internal logic to patterns - not just anything will work. Then insight arrives: Aha! You discover a pattern that fits. You use it, even though you must leave out much of the material you gathered.

This is the act of creation: You descend into chaos and return. Your original idea before your descent was lost along the way, although it may have been recovered on your way back.

How close is the account in Genesis 1 to being a true description of creation?

"In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss,..."

This passage has been interpreted to mean that God created the universe, totally new, out of nothing. This misleads people into thinking that a creation must be totally new and out of nothing. No creation ever is. Moreover, "without form and void ... [in] darkness" describes not a creation, but the state one enters in the process of creation.

"...and a mighty wind swept over the surface of the waters." This is also read *"God's spirit hovered over the waters."*

This is an ancient image: The creator god hovering over the primordial ocean. It pictures the mind confronting formlessness.

"God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light; and God saw the light was good,...."

Here creation is by language, which gives form to the chaos, and indeed the descriptions we apply, and the stories we tell, do shape our experience.

"...God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters,' ... and separated the water under the vault from the water above it...."

This is the sole case where God does

What do UUs believe?

"What do Unitarians believe?" people ask. Here's an answer:

"The question isn't really applicable. Unitarian Universalists tend to find that believing in things is not a particularly useful spiritual practice.

"Creeds were created by the early Church to exclude people, the Gnostics in particular. They were not created for any valid spiritual reason, but rather a political one. This has resulted in the unfortunate assumption that religion consists of belief in doctrines. This assumption has been a curse on Western spirituality for over a millennium and a half. We try to avoid that mistake."

First Cause

All the proofs of God's existence have flaws in them. The view of God as creator gives us the most famous: St. Thomas Aquinas's proof by First Cause:

- (1) Everything has a cause.
- (2) An infinite sequence of causes is impossible.
- (3) Therefore, there must be a first cause, which we call God.

This contains a major logical problem. Let's rephrase it in a more compact form:

- (4) Everything has a cause.
- (5) Not everything has a cause (which is what (2) and (3) say).
- (6) Therefore, God exists.

Now premises (4) and (5) are obviously contradictory. Contradiction is not permitted, since it is a theorem in logic that from two contradictory premises one can prove literally anything. From these two contradictory premises Aquinas chose to prove God exists.

A Gnostic Creation Myth

Here is a (somewhat simplified) Gnostic Christian myth about the origin of the world.

The true reality is of course beyond comprehension, but we may think of it as a couple, a god and a goddess. The goddess we will call Sophia (Wisdom). Sophia wished to create, and since her consort was disinterested, she created by herself. Her thought became reality and there was created a region of light and in that region there was perfection.

But beyond the edge of that region there was shadow and there arose a lord of the shadow and when he saw that he was not the highest god he became jealous. It was he who created the world as we see it, and heaven and the angels. His world was only made

of matter; it had no spirit in it. It was he who boasted "I am the only god and there is none other."

As in any act of creation, there is an area of perfection, and an area where the pattern does not fully work. Twice the myth suggests that flaws of the creation are due to flaws of the creator. Is this true?

There is an understanding that problems arose from the splitting of the area of light from the area of darkness surrounding it, consciousness from unconsciousness, or ego from shadow, in Jungian terminology. Any pattern or structure or organization is a curse to those things which don't fit within it.

There is a second creator god in the Gnostic myth. The creator god is an inferior, flawed, arrogant deity who created a material world with no spirit in it and lords over his creation falsely bragging he is the highest god. This is the God the orthodox Christians worship. This expresses the Gnostics' belief in the dualism between spirit and matter and their hostility toward matter. It also expresses their hostility to the god who created this material world. We feel the same way, but are not as open: consider the expressions "an act of God" which means "a natural disaster" and "playing God" which means behaving like the Gnostics' creator god.

When Sophia saw the world without spirit in it, she was sorry for her creation. She came down and breathed spirit onto it. She entered the matter as divine sparks, but she was abused by the angels of the creator god, became trapped in the matter, and became blind.

It was the goal of the Gnostics to liberate the spark of spirit trapped within their physical bodies. This spirit is Wisdom, which has become blind. The liberation consists of gaining insight, *gnosis*. Whereas the orthodox

Christians believed that the great problem of the human condition was sin (*hamartia*, literally: "missing the mark"), the Gnostics considered the great problem to be ignorance.

The Gnostics, like some followers of psychotherapy today, made self-knowledge and self-transformation their religious quest. Like the followers of psychotherapy, and unlike orthodox Christians, they considered the psyche to have the means within itself for salvation. "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you," says the Gospel of Thomas.

Among the spiritual practices prescribed by the Gnostics were meditation and acts of creation, such as composing new and personal myths. It is therefore not quite accurate to say the Gnostics believed this myth; rather we can say that one of them composed it, and it does express their attitudes.

Submitting to The Sun

As a spiritual practice, write or prepare talks to clarify your thoughts. We think much faster than we write or speak. In thinking, we skip steps and make assumptions. The mind is, Buddhists say, like a drunken monkey, running from one thought to another, picking it up, looking at it, and dropping it to rush to another. Buddhists meditate to quiet the monkey mind. Writing can also work.

The Sun: A Magazine of Ideas, 107 North Robertson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516-9908 (12 issues, \$30) has a section called "Us: Readers Write About ___" which announces topics in advance and publishes essays the readers submit. You could try a year of submitting to *The Sun*, either as an individual practice, or as the basis for a spiritual intensive.