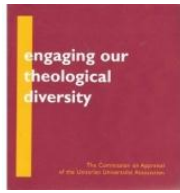


Evolution, WYSIWYG and The Bomb
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I would like to preface today's presentation with the fact that I do not profess to be an ultimate authority on the subjects that I will discuss this morning. What I say today is a result of my ongoing voyage of discovery here with you as I share my thoughts and experiences. Something else I would point out is the wide range of theological thought represented here in this congregation and in UUs in general. You may have noticed the image of the UUA publication entitled "engaging our theological diversity" on



the wall next to my workstation in our congregational office. In that publication, and, indeed, in a polling of our own membership several years ago, we see that we are comfortable wearing many and multiple theological labels, of belief, doubt or unbelief, of theist or non-theist, of Christian, Buddhist, Pagan or Earth Centered, of humanist, agnostic or atheist or whatever. As a point of information, this "diversity" document is available on the UUA Website as a downloadable PDF document. It is also available on Amazon.com, new in hardcover, for something over a hundred dollars. I would choose the PDF if I were you!

Evolution

According to a June first Gallup Poll, in the United States, 46% hold the Creationist View of Human Origins. In this Gallup Poll article by Frank Newport, he goes on to explain that forty-six percent of Americans believe in the creationist view that God created humans in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years. The prevalence of this creationist view of the origin of humans is essentially unchanged from 30 years ago, when Gallup first asked the question. About a third of Americans believe that humans evolved, but with God's guidance; 15% say humans evolved, but that God had no part in the process.

So there you have it – almost half of the folks in this country have it completely wrong – they hold a belief that is at odds with the preponderance of the scientific community. In my opinion, just as wrong as if they believed that the earth is flat. Does this shock you? It does me, every time I hear it. And I disagree with the one third of our population that believes that the process of evolution requires supernatural help. I'm quite happy to find myself among the 15% that accept the position that evolution is a perfectly natural process – much the same as rivers flowing downhill and the earth revolving around the sun – without supernatural assistance.

David Loy and John Stanley, in an article in the online Huffington Post entitled, "Buddhist Philosophy of Evolution", they tell us that " according to Brian Swimme, the greatest scientific discovery of all time is that if you leave hydrogen gas alone (for 14 billion years, plus or minus a few hundred million years) "it [eventually] turns into rosebushes, giraffes, and humans." And they go on to suggest that this also might be the most important spiritual discovery of all time.

When I saw the name Swimme, I realized I'd run into it before. If you click on the link on our home page at www.frederickuu.org, you will realize that Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker are the co-authors of a film that is used in one of our adult religious education classes starting in September, entitled "Journey of the Universe – The Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation", led by our minister, Rev. Carl Gregg. You can register online for that class and others.

Presently, there are four books on my nightstand that relate to this subject. At least I think they do. I keep my copy of the New Revised Standard Version of the Christian Bible there for reference and recently added a Britannica book containing Charles Darwin's Origin of Species and Descent of Man to the pile. In addition to that, I purchased a copy of the Koran and the Tanakh. Now some of you may ask, what is the Tanakh? That's T-A-N-A-K-H. Well, I didn't know until I looked at the front cover, where it plainly states, "The Jewish Bible, Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures. Upon further examination at home, I discovered that this particular new translation, except for the order of the books within – The Torah – that is to say the Five Books of Moses, The Prophets and The Writings, reads very much like my New Revised Standard Version. I went so far as to compare chapter and verse and the text was almost identical. I'm sure it would take an expert to listen to them read and tell them apart.

It has always been my understanding that believers in creationism or intelligent design base their position on a literal interpretation of Genesis, The First Book of Moses.

The Muslim version of creationism, if I understand it correctly, depends simply on their belief in God as the creator, since there apparently is not a version of Genesis in the Koran.

I believe that some folks seek literal truth from their bibles while others merely seek myth and a metaphor as comfort and inspiration for the human spirit. Some folks in our congregation have rightfully voiced concern that we might risk wasting energy in condemning folks of some other faiths for dismissing the validity of the theory of evolution rather than focusing our energies on how the many implications of evolution might give comfort and inspiration to us as Unitarian Universalists.

WYSIWYG

What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get — W-Y-S-I-W-Y-G — A lot of folks are actually pronouncing the acronym — wysiwyg — see, I'm guilty myself — not only of pronouncing it but also misusing it a bit. It's customarily used as a software term used to describe a method of manipulating images, numbers and text on your computer screen that avoids all the messy steps of manipulating code or even zeros and ones, and, believe me, moving zeros and ones around is tedious work, I know, I've done it.

I misused it here by using it to describe ultimate reality. I made the same mistake of oversimplification that Renee Descarte did in his statement "I think, therefore I am". Life is more complicated than simple thinking. There are also emotions and passions. Maybe he should have said "I think and have feelings, therefore I am".

What we see, hear, smell, taste and touch is not all we get and I'm not going to make an acronym out of it and darn well not going to pronounce it.

When we get beyond the strictly human aspects of reality, we are stuck with the problem of what is real and what is not real. It's hard not think of ultimate reality as one great, enormous tangled up complicated mess. And it's pretty hard to untangle. And that's our job as human beings – to do our best to untangle it. Maybe that's one of our main jobs here in this congregation.

There are three books on my bookshelf that have helped me. All three are available from the UUA bookstore. They are entitled Building Your Own Theology with subtitles of Introduction, Exploring, and Ethics. For those of us uncomfortable with the theology term I suggest that we might say we are building our own versions of a just and truthful reality. The Introduction volume was used in an Adult Religious Education class here several years ago and we can hope that it will be offered again – using all three volumes. In any case, they could be used as a basis for discussion in one of our Friendly Forums.



The Bomb

The Bomb — actually it's two bombs — nuclear weapons and what I call the climate bomb. They've both become political and religious footballs — both on a national and international stages — I don't believe we can deny it.

I am tempted to stop here, shrug my shoulders and end with "enough said".

Not going to!

The spread of nuclear weapons — a recent president couldn't pronounce it — it's nuclear — not nu cu lar — the spread of nuclear weapons to terrorist groups and to nations like North Korea is mostly a simple policing/political problem but it seems as if the middle east - as is evidenced by the confrontation between Iran and Israel and efforts by Iran to produce the bomb — is a continuation of the centuries long struggle for religious and political power centered around Jerusalem. It's especially frustrating to see that religious and ethnic differences traditionally trump political efforts to solve problems such as these. The end appears not in sight.

We are looking for answers to the climate change problem, if indeed if there is one. And if we are to believe what a large majority of the scientific community tells us, we do have a problem. Why are so many folks so willing to dismiss this problem because of the economic cost of the proposed solutions? The decision process is simple. If the scientists are right, doing nothing will be a total disaster for all the inhabitants of our planet. The costs of doing nothing are too high! Let's do what we have to do and take the risk that the scientific community might be wrong! Just plain common sense!

I would like to end with a quote from a May 12, 2008 speech by Senator and then presidential candidate John McCain. He Said: "We have many advantages in the fight against global warming, but time is not one of them. Instead of idly debating the precise extent of global warming, or the precise timeline of global warming, we need to deal with the central facts of rising temperatures, rising waters, and all the endless troubles that global warming will bring. We stand warned by serious and credible scientists

across the world that time is short and the dangers are great. The most relevant question now is whether our own government is equal to the challenge."

So be it.