

THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Lecture and Discussion Points by Rebecca Parker, Theme Speaker
LREDA Fall Conference 2002

SATURDAY

“Spirit is movie language.”

- 1.) The spirit moves me
- 2.) Is Transforming
- 3.) Is saved, good and holy
- 4.) Creativity

Is there Evil?

- 1.) There are evil behaviors and events – harmful
- 2.) We can create Hell on earth
- 3.) We are all human beings – therefore in the context of our theology, human beings are inherently worthy, but there is a wide range of behaviors and manifestations of this reality.
- 4.) We will internally (conceptualize) view ourselves as good with difficulty to identify our contrast (bad) side. It is more common for us to see the duality externally, rather than internally.

Transpersonal evil – (not individual, but a system)

- 1.) Self correcting system, such as democracy
- 2.) Safety and goodness matters – boundaries are in place

It is valuable to become explicit about our theology, in order to see the ways it nurtures/supports us and also hinders us.

“For flesh to become word,” we must own our theology and then transform its parts and our experience of it.
All of us are able to demonize others.

“If we keep our humanism complex enough,” we can recognize many people come to our doors, therefore evil can be among us at any time. The notion of human beings as perfect is unrealistic.

“Some of our actions are good and evil simultaneously.

Theological House Concept

It is a New England style house – reflecting our history of theology.

“Our cultural ethos”

“We feel at home here.” – Ask ourselves “Why do we feel so at home here?”

Some of us were thrown out of the house and we found this house – out of a state of homelessness.

The door’s in the wrong place – once we move into this house we become caretakers of the house, Homemakers and Renovators.

Diversity in UUA today has taken the approach that we would simply open the doors to our house and welcome in our neighbors but we haven’t changed the walls or structure of the house (it stays Euro-American, New England). We know this, but find it difficult to change. This could be considered an example of “transpersonal evil” – covenant of behavior may exclude those different from those extending the covenant or opening the door. (Cultural dominance)

Post Modern Theology – vary in notions of “differences” among people.

There are several theological perspectives:

- One mountain, different pathways with differing scenery
- Many mountains, many pathways to take you to the mountain each mountain and path offers unique experiences

“Faculties of the Soul,” origins of teaching faculty, capacities of the soul. (William Channing spoke about this concept)

- 1.) Reason
- 2.) Feel emotion
- 3.) Religious Sentiment
- 4.) Create, build, make things
- 5.) Senses
- 6.) Ability to see and respond to beauty
- 7.) Inwardly know right from wrong

Inner educational work as inquirers of life (discovering life) leads to knowledge of GOD, or of the divine.

Channing – defines education

Call forth the powers of the soul – wake up our capacity to feel, think, create, moral discernment, our connections with one another, to appreciate beauty – allows human beings to gain an unfolding understanding of (through educations) God as an incarnating, rising, unfolding presence of God. We are the presence of divinity in the world.

(Religious) Education is the essential spiritual practice of a Faith Community – it is a core aspect of our faith foundation theological perspective.

Rebecca questions the use of “personal enrichment” and “self help” programs in a more consumer-orienting culture – rather than an “unfolding of the soul” which is an expanding sense of self in relationship with others (social justice work, social engagement/spiritual practice). Powers of the soul = the incarnation of God in the world.

Paolo Friere –

Social transformation comes from engaging the powers of the soul in all people through appropriate education – as a means of liberation.

How can we bring this theology back into (free) (humanistic) public education, which is a part of our Faith heritage – Elizabeth Peabody (influenced by Channing) Horace Mann, John Dewey, Margaret Fuller,

Dewey's: Active involvement in classroom environment as influential participants → citizenship → promotes democracy in society → fair and just world.

(Articulating the importance of these values are important in public education, run for local school board.)

Violence

Richard Rosen – author about violence

Human cell affected by violence: isolates, creates intense false bonds, black and white thinking, violence replicates itself, destroys membranes, fragments

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

“Violence fragments the soul.” (Forms disassociate people)

Breaks the psyche – child cannot trust their own experience, feelings, hearing.

Destroys to “membrane of protection” – permeable boundaries
containment of being experiences passing in and out of membrane

“The violence forms an intense bond between the violator and the violated.” (Possession – incredibly violent intimacy)

STATISTICS

- Suicide rates have remained static for last 100 years
- There are more suicides than murders in the U.S.
- Suicides of veterans of Vietnam number more since the war than deaths during the war

U.S. Currently – Post 9/11

Isolating – self in the world – idealized self-image

Fragmented – Good and Evil thinking

Destroys Boundaries – Extra security measures, policies, try to re-establish the membrane

Creates intense false bonds – distortion of relationships, unbreakable, inseparable

Replicates – War on drugs, war on poverty – replicating systems of violence

Violence → Theological Transformation to Salvation

Hosea Ballou – “Exemplars of Love” (including Jesus)

Attract others – learn loving by being drawn to Exemplars of Love.

“Our understanding love must be as deep and strong as our understanding of violence.”

“We must train ourselves to respond to our urgings to connect with others in love rather than giving into violence.”

Question: To whom does the house of our theology belong?

- 1.) It does not belong to us
- 2.) It belongs to anyone who needs its shelter
- 3.) Our life belongs to the spirit of life, not our own life
- 4.) Anyone who seeks restoration and transformation

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