

sister who's perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue 167, May 2013, copyright

Overview

It seems that whenever people hear the word "theology," they automatically presume that it refers to something complicated and irrelevant, rather than to something that we each unavoidably do within every moment of our lives. The question, therefore, is not whether we do theology, but rather of which and what kind of theology it is that we are doing and, additionally, what the particular implications and consequences of our personal theologies—in practice—turn out to be.

A Theology of Daily-ness

It's not difficult to acknowledge that each moment of life is affected, influenced, shaped, and perhaps even controlled by both material and immaterial things and that these include actions which must be repeated. Actions such as eating, for example, must be done every day. There is no "once and for all," no "well at least I'll never have to do that again," nor any "I'm finally done with that."

On an immaterial level, as much as some may wish to ignore it, we also need daily infusions of meaning, purpose, positive intention, and interactive love. Without these, our spirits become as unhealthy and ineffective as our bodies would be without regular infusions of healthy food. In both cases, we can approach these daily needs with carelessness or with wisdom and love. By virtue of being daily recurrences, we may even choose to approach them in a somewhat ritualistic fashion, in order to give them even greater effectiveness.

Few would argue, for example, that a meal eaten within a calm and focused context is infinitely preferable to one eaten in haste and with a myriad of distractions. If the question were put to us a half hour after a hasty meal, how many of us would be able to describe the actual taste of the food we ate?

A theology of daily-ness, therefore, recognizes each day, indeed each moment of each day, as a sacred convergence of body, mind, and spirit and acknowledges that much more than merely ourselves is involved. An understanding and an awareness of being alive within each moment and experience, must not only be maintained but is, among other things, a matter of acknowledging that some things are appropriately repetitious, some things are sequential steps, and some things form an essential context for positively responding to the essence of Emily's question within the third act of Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town," paraphrased as "Does anyone know they live while they do it?" A theology of daily-ness answers, "Yes, I do."

As mysterious as the Divine and even as our own spiritual natures may always be, an interactive relationship with this aspect of ourselves is more essential to getting the most out of life than all the money in the world. A confirmation of this is obvious within the rhetorical question attributed to Jesus, "What would it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?" Avoiding the loss of one's soul, begins within each daily moment. Working out a spiritual practice that supports and nurtures such awareness and willingness to act, is a worthy place to begin, regardless of one's particular conception of the Divine.

Specifically because such practices are forever evolving and generally reflect current levels of personal and spiritual growth, it is unavoidable that a very broad spectrum of possibilities will be encountered—none of which need to be regarded competitively. As presented by a poster that I saw many years ago, an unknown author observed that, "The race is not necessarily to the swift, but rather to the one who keeps on running."

I would simply add that it is not only the body which must keep on running.

May one and all everything, blessed and loved ever be.

A Theology of Cyclical-ness

Going beyond mere repetition, one can also recognize interdependent relationships between repetitious actions. It is specifically the rest of Winter, for example, that empowers the virtual explosion of new life in Spring. It is specifically the release of non-essential elements in Autumn that empowers the adversarial extremes of Winter to be nurturing rather than life-threatening. It is specifically the generosity of Summer that empowers all of the other seasons to have what they need in order to be what they are, in the best possible ways.

Similarly, we each receive a great many material and immaterial resources from others, shape what we have received in various ways, and then pass along the results. No one has ever lived who was not inescapably involved in this ongoing exchange and interdependency, regardless of whether or not he or she was even aware of it. The fact that we cannot easily perceive all of the relevant participants, makes them no less real.

A theology of cyclical-ness recognizes that there is a certain pattern to the unfolding of events; that while there may be unique actions and developments within particular repetitions of any specific cycle, there is an underlying familiarity which it is unfortunately easy to ignore, specifically because it rarely does anything to call attention to itself.

Imagine if you will, an evening rush hour traffic scene within which all of the vehicles involved slowly but more or less abruptly come to a halt. Car doors then begin to open and literally thousands of people climb out and gaze upward in silence, awestruck at the beauty of an evening sunset painted across clouds high overhead. A few moments later, the light begins to fade and the colors to disappear. In reverent silence, everyone gets back into their cars and the flow of traffic slowly resumes, curiously less hostile or aggressive, as the image of beauty lingers within their minds. Mere participation in such a sacred pause has somehow changed them.

The principle danger of cyclical-ness, of course, is that of repeating the actions as if by rote, simply imitating what one remembers rather than experiencing each occurrence as

new and unique. An old saying advises that "familiarity breeds contempt," but this is not an easy phrase to fully understand. While it makes sense that seeing a particular thing over and over has the potential to recreate the original blessing, there is equally the potential to think that we have seen all that the particular thing has to show us. As taught to me by an elderly quilter of fabrics, how much one sees often depends upon how closely one looks.

One of the unfortunate limitations of being human, however, is that we have the ability neither to perceive nor to comprehend everything that is nevertheless presented to our five physical senses. Therein, of course, is the blessing of cyclical-ness; that there will be another chance to see even more. One could even suppose that such recurrence is a message that there is in fact more to see; that as much as we think we know all that can be known about a particular thing, it is presented to us once again specifically because some higher wisdom is aware of what we have overlooked and is eager for us to discover it.

The theology of cyclical-ness, therefore, is the potentially never-ending invitation to discover newness within what we might consider to be familiar. It is the faith that no matter how long we have studied, worked, and drawn tentative conclusions within or about a particular area, there is still more to be discovered by means of further review and re-examination. It is the acknowledgement that specifically because how much we see depends upon how close we look, we have chosen to look even closer, rather than to allow the current cycle of learning to be our last.

Specifically because of a theology of cyclical-ness, I can wake up each morning and begin with reminding myself that even as I go through the usual motions of putting the bed coverings back into place, feeding the dogs, and reviewing my list of tasks for today, I can also anticipate that unexpected and potentially wonderful things will happen—specifically because it is not only myself that wakes up to new possibilities each day, but all living things around me as well. We are each going through cycles that invite new possibilities.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

A Theology of Seasonal-ness

I suspect there is no end to the possible applications of the time-worn metaphor of the forest and the trees. Sometimes the lament is that one "can't see the trees because of the forest" while at other times it is that one "can't see the forest because of the trees." A goal of holistic and complete perception must find ways to equally see both.

A distinction between those with autism and those described as "neuro-typical," is the common tendency for the autistic mind to first perceive the details (the trees) and the neuro-typical mind to first perceive the generalities (the forest). Seeing the complete picture is equally challenging for both. To see all there is to see, we need each other. Central to a theology of seasonal-ness is perceiving not only days, but also weeks, months, and years.

From a slightly different perspective, a theology of seasonal-ness recognizes that the many diverse days within each season have one or more commonalities. While recognizing differences is vital to individual identification and integration, recognizing commonalities is vital to communal relationships, collaborative efforts, and greater realities than any individual could accomplish all alone. Additionally, insights that are individually empowering can be found within the discovery of commonality, just as much as insights that are communally empowering can be found within discoveries of individuality. There is no inherent competition.

A theology of seasonal-ness, therefore, is a recognition that collaboration is not just a matter of individuals working together, but also of communities interacting constructively with individuals and individuals interacting constructively with communities. An individual

*"Thanks to memory,
within me is a collection
of variations of myself embodying
each and every pivotal moment;
eager to contribute
in any way that they can"*

-- Sister Who

who refuses to collaborate with a community contributes to his or her own isolation; a community that refuses to integrate the contribution of a particular individual acts against its own best interests. A genuinely effective strategy must not only integrate both, but also respect the season which both are experiencing. Clearly, effective communication and ongoing dialogue are required.

A theology of seasonal-ness is therefore also a recognition that we will attend to some things now and other things later, addressing each thing within its appropriate season. A principle challenge of this undertaking, however, is that seasons of life are not conveniently labeled "spring, summer, autumn, and winter," and that the seasons of life may also be virtually infinite in number, depending mostly upon how we choose to describe them.

Nonetheless, the reality of such seasons is virtually impossible to deny. No amount of belief in the contrary will consistently release us from the necessity of adapting to seasons—wearing various kinds of protection from environmental elements within particular seasons, in order to avoid injury to whatever extent we are able. I do not, for example, wear tennis shoes to go jogging with my dogs when the street is covered with snow, nor do I trudge along with warm rubber boots on a hot summer's day. Similarly, there are times when the various relationships within my life are in need of patience and other times when the need is for initiative and motivation. In order to constructively relate to the seasons of my own life, I must pay attention to what, in fact, the needs of the moment are.

An additional but often overlooked blessing of this accommodation of seasons, is that in a sense, I become multiple versions of myself. Who I am within summer months has some commonalities with who I am within winter months, but numerous distinctions as well. A theology of seasonal-ness acknowledges yet one more way that each of us is, in fact, multi-dimensional. Increasing awareness of the many distinct persons that in fact I am, therefore, is yet another wondrous aspect of growth and of genuinely living.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

A Theology of Timelessness

If a principle purpose of theology is an awareness of divine presence and meaning, the very notion of living within Time while retaining awareness of that which does not, could be dismissed as both irrational and impossible—even more so if one truly believes that that which does not live within Time is every bit as real as that which does (and vice versa). Indeed, among the most challenging aspects of life may be that it is simultaneously both timeless and experienced within Time.

At the heart of theological timelessness is the recognition that whatever we do within time, may have eternal effects. The result of this does not have to be austerity, however, when one considers that among the principle goals of life is not only the creation of deep understanding, not only the growth of the soul, but also the genuine discovery and experience of joy. Indeed, without joy, love could not be the healing energy that it is.

Central to any theology of timelessness is, perhaps obviously, the existence of the Divine Itself. Without timelessness, the Divine could not embody eternity, infinity, and transcendence. In a very real sense, without timelessness, it would be very difficult for any conception of the Divine to be innately greater than humanity at all. As I remarked to many during my days in theological school, however, "if Godde is no bigger than human theology, then Godde is not big enough to be Godde."

The miracle of faith and of all spirituality, is that the embodiment of perfect love, perfect wisdom, and multi-dimensional transcendence is mysteriously drawn to relationship with something as limited in every way as humanity.

A theology of timelessness, however, recognizes not only our limitations, not only possibilities of interaction with all that is unlimited, but also that such relationship does not leave us in rigid or static states of being—unable to grow, to develop, to evolve, or to become even more. Indeed, to have a theology of timelessness at all, we must fully recognize that we ourselves are alive and potentially timeless as well.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

On a Personal Note

I believe in always "putting one's best foot forward," to encourage the most positive contribution and outcome within every circumstance; I don't believe in compromising honesty or truth in order to do this. The purpose of this small column on the back of my newsletter is to provide updates on my life, since this seems to be the only means used by some to keep track of my life's progression—which is fine. I do understand that life is a very busy place for just about everyone of late.

On a positive note, the portable chapel will once again appear at this year's Peoples Fair in Denver, Colorado, this time specifically on behalf of God Space Sanctuary. Another hopeful area of activity is slow but persistent progress toward both public performance and video recording of three modern "morality plays" featuring Sister Who. After that, it will be time to once again focus upon creation of photos for the 2014 calendar, video-recording of twenty-four more episodes of "Sister Who Presents," and hopefully also participation in the World OutGames in Antwerp Belgium during the first week of August, if a means to cover the cost of airfare can be found.

Of a more challenging nature are my ongoing efforts to come to terms with having autism, with sleep difficulties, with auto repair expenses, with additional financial concerns, and with service dog training. Ah, well, I'm just doing my best to make life beautiful, no matter how adversarial it has frequently been, of late.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

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