

## **Roots and Wings**

**June 4, 2006**

### **Flower Communion Sunday**

In the last few years I have gotten into seriously following baseball. It began by accident - by an accident when Johnny Damon and a right fielder of the Red Sox collided in the outfield. Johnny Damon with great grace went airborne for about three seconds before he landed with a great thud on the ground. He sustained a concussion and sported a black eye and a bruise for a while but played hard, wisely and became an icon and leader for the Red Sox till he moved to play with the Yankees this season. I think often of that moment when he shifted from being in the air on the wings of whatever it is and was that sustained him to the next moment when he was on the ground-back rooted to not only a stable surface but grounded into a world of hurt and pain.

I continue to watch baseball wondering about the players and the plays and marveling at a sport that can create such unpleasant and rude behavior from fans, and that can divide and distance friends and family, I shake my head in sadness and wonderment. But most of all whenever Manny Ramirez or David Ortiz or Coco Crisp or A Rod or Pedro Martinez or another player comes up to bat or makes a play and they do some sort of religious ritual to mark it, especially if they look upwards and then to the ground I wonder what they are thinking.

I would be thinking, if I were doing that ritual act, which is not likely anyway- and not because I would not be on a sports team, but because I don't normally get into public displays of ritualized religious behavior. I would be thinking - roots and wings. To be clearer I am thinking and telling you what I believe- that there is probably some transcendent quality to life that is external to us while at the same time I believe that we are grounded to the earth and all that that means. By no means do I believe that there is a

human like figure residing in the upper realms of air that has dominion over land, beast or human. However, what I have come to understand, again this is only for me, is that transcendence implies that there is a reality, a force that is outside of me and available to be with me to root me firmly in existence. Roots and wings are connected enabling me to function in the world as a spiritual being on an earthly plain. Questions that have emerged for me are. What is it of my being that is divine and connected to a transcendent reality and what is it of my being that is rooted to earthiness and how much of that is reality and truth and how do I capture the winged transcendence in order to assist me be a good spiritual person who lives on the earth?

The recent controversy over the Da Vinci code has lead many people to once again question the authority of church, the teachings of Christianity, the truth about the divinity of Jesus and all this has led many to explore that UU principle we hold so dear- the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I don't want to get into all the issues in the book or movie except for the point that is near and dear to Unitarian Universalist. This point is one that has always had us labeled as Heretics and of course a point that I think is connected to today's theme of Roots and Wings. Since the beginning of Christianity a point of argument was around those who believed that Jesus was the Christ or anointed one and that Jesus was one with God, hence was God. These became the Trinitarians. The other group believed that Jesus was divine, but not the same as God, these were led by a priest named Arius, they were called the Arians. We Unitarian Universalist are descended from the Arians. The Council of Nicea, called by the Emperor Constantine, two centuries after the death of Jesus argued, among other points, the divinity of Jesus. The Arian point of view did not prevail and all those who believed that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine became the heretics and outcasts of organized orthodox religion. And though the winners of council

did get to put forth their point of view and though through the years organized religion has determined which are orthodox or heretical teachings and though the church says it gets to determine the right teachings there have always been others who continued and continue to search for truth. So the Da Vinci Code theme appeals because we continue to search for the whole story, and because there is something in us that loves the underdog, and because we suspect that the divine status would not just be available to one man but available to all. This belief that the divine “spark” is in all is called Gnosticism. When the Council of Nicea ended and the winning theology was selected, the losers were forced into submission, repenting of their old teachings, but sometimes they went into hiding instead of being co-opted into the mainstream of religious teaching. The writings that they had were numerous though often times destroyed if found. I am sure you know the old saying- “history is written by the winners, for when two cultures clash, the loser is wiped out and the winners write books which glorify their own thinking and belittle the loser’s teachings.”<sup>1</sup> A few wise men hide their writings in vases in caves- these were discovered in 1945 and are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gnostic Gospels.

The basic Gnostic teaching is that when humans were created (not in the classic Adam Eve sense but metaphorically) a spark of the divine entered human form. This winged transcendence is in each and every human; for we are created in the image of the Gods. And further teachings of Gnosticism are that the spark of the divine in humans can find its way back to the divine source of all existence in a “solitary” act of knowledge. Talk about two connecting and strong Unitarian Universalist principles - the divinity and inherent worth and dignity of every person and the search for truth and meaning, no wonder we UU’s are considered heretics and no wonder we don’t “get” the controversy over the Da Vinci Code, but instead want to read

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from CLF Quest newsletter June 2005 Volume LX Number 7. Michael McGee

the book and see the movie. In fact we Unitarian Universalist are often accused of looking for salvation through study instead of salvation by faith.

Connecting us back to roots and wings is the idea that the divine, that most sacred essence of all existence is within each of us and that when we grasp this knowledge we can become aware of our holy essence and then we can know who we are and who God or the divine is.

Roots hold us close and wings set us free. Roots hold us to earth so that we can act with justice, mercy, compassion, earthiness, materially and practically. Roots are the connections we have with family, friend, church, community, universe they ground us so that we can be better persons, so that we can find ways to act with love and care when troubles abound, so we can find friends and family to hold us when the problems of living on the material plane menace us, so we can find ways to be the best spiritual persons we can be. And wings allow us to rise above earthly cares and problems, to rise above the pettiness of minor bumps and bruises, to allow our spirits to become in contact with the holy and sacred, which though inside us needs to be filled and refilled by the interaction with the sacred which we so often identify as being outside and above us.

So when I watch the baseball players engage in their ritual act of hands and eyes raised upwards I will think of the wings of my being connected externally but ever grounded to the roots of my history, my experiences, my humanness, your humanness, my trials and tribulations and your trials and tribulations. There is so much that could distance us from one another, sports affinities, religious beliefs, economic, racial, ethnic categories, let us ever be mindful of the one thing that does connect us- the spark of the divine that is rooted in all and that gives our spirits the wings to touch one another beyond the physical places- those places where we most need to connect the places of spirit source of our essence and being. So Be It.

