

## A Personal Journey to Diversity

Jerry Jacoby

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Ten years ago this fall I attended a prayer conference at the Nevada County Fairgrounds. One of the speakers, Juan Carlos Ortez, talked about spiritual food, and I was so profoundly moved that I started an odyssey that has led to me to this pulpit today. For some time I had had a vague desire to read *Creation Continues*, by Fritz Kunkel, so that's where I started. That book is a lengthy commentary on the Gospel of Matthew from a Jungian point of view. Sometime back then I happened to see a photograph of an early copy in Greek. The text was all capital Greek letters set right next to one another, with no spaces between the words, no commas, no periods, no paragraphs, and no chapter breaks. Question: how did the readers back then know where one topic, say, ended and the next one began? Kunkel suggested that the topical breaks had to be key words in the text, such as the sentence, "And Jesus left that place."<sup>1</sup> Other possible phrases for major divisions are "Jesus went out of the house," or "Six days later," or "When Jesus had finished saying these things," and so forth. Scanning through my study edition of the New Revised Standard Version, it was obvious that the approved chapter divisions did not always follow this division, but I decided to put it to the test. That is, I decided to see what's really there, rather than what a bunch of orthodox theologians say is there.

After about six months of spending an hour or so every morning studying Matthew and commentaries about it, I reached chapter 15 and this story, which I will show is germane to the topic of diversity.

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. [That's in southern Lebanon.] <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

<sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

<sup>24</sup>He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

<sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

<sup>26</sup>He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

<sup>27</sup>She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

<sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

<sup>29</sup>After Jesus had left that place ...<sup>2</sup>

It took me many, many hours to understand this story and its relevance to us today, which I will condense to about five minutes. Begin with checking the translation. The word "dogs" isn't quite right; the Greek word and its diminutive could both be translated dogs, but one meant the mongrels that run in the street, and the other meant the household pets. Here the diminutive is used, referring to the pets.<sup>3</sup> The word "fair" isn't quite correct either, and other translations use the word "right."<sup>4</sup> So his answer to the woman should read, "It is not right to

take the children's food and throw it to the pet dogs." The woman's reply also refers to the pet dogs.

Next, check for idioms. The lost sheep obviously refers to the poor, the outcast, the downtrodden, etc. Further, Lamsa, whom I told you about in my previous sermon, says the phrase about the children's food is an idiom that refers to the truths of Judaism.<sup>5</sup> So, Jesus' answer to the woman means, "It is not right to share the truths of Judaism with the pagans."

Next, look at social context. At first he did not answer her, and that was consistent with Jewish behavior during those times: Jewish males did not speak to gentile women—it was simply not done.<sup>6</sup> His response to his disciples was also consistent, in that he reminded them of his mission: to the poor, the outcast, and the downtrodden children of Israel.

Next, look at the context of the story in the text, and here we find the meaning relevant to us today. In the previous grouping of stories, Jesus was ministering to the Jews, and it was spring time. We find this in words here and there and words that aren't there. The feeding of the 5,000 happened in chapter 14, and Mark's version of the story had green grass in that place.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the Greek word that was translated baskets meant Jewish baskets.<sup>8</sup> Third, John's telling of this story had Jesus escaping from the crowd lest they make him king by force.<sup>9</sup> And fourth, in the previous group of stories, in chapter 14, he was rejected by the people of his home town, because they were stuck in their traditions. He was also rejected by the Jewish authorities, because they were stuck in the law and had lost their humanity.

On the other hand, in the grouping of stories that follow, the Greek word for baskets meant Gentile baskets.<sup>10</sup> The people praised the God of Israel,<sup>11</sup> and the feeding of the 4,000 took place on dirt,<sup>12</sup> so it was late summer or early fall. This was the clue to what happened in Lebanon. Following his rejection, Jesus went on a sabbatical or retreat for four to five

months. He took some time off to figure things out. Up to that point, he was an ethnocentric Jewish male—dare I add prejudice—but he was visited by a messenger from Spirit. In modern terms, he experienced a synchronicity, transcended his prejudice, and began ministering to the gentiles. Using a word I will define shortly, he became worldcentric. And this is the lesson for us, and it is just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago: Be open to Spirit and the messages that Spirit sends us, often from the most unexpected sources. I am persuaded that the Gospel we attribute to Mathew was written by a master Rabbi, that its purpose was and is to transform the reader from ethnocentric to worldcentric, and, further, if we have been paying attention, then right in this story is where it's supposed to happen.

Next, I would like to take a brief look at Alcoholics Anonymous, which has been called the most profound social movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham studied this most profound social movement and wrote a book about it: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness*. Sobriety involves much more than not drinking. Successful sobriety requires discarding our old way of life and learning a new way of life. Another way of saying it is that we all have a map which is our way of interpreting reality. The old map has to be thrown away and a new map has to be developed. The founders of AA discovered that the new way of life could only be taught and learned by the process of telling stories.<sup>13</sup> The rabbis two millennia ago taught by telling stories, and the pioneers of AA rediscovered the same method.

Through the practice of hearing and telling stories, we discover and slowly learn to use a new “map,” a map that is more “right” because it is more useful for our purposes. Using this map gives some sense of *place*, of how things are

located and how they fit; and this flows into a developing sense of how *we* fit,  
...<sup>14</sup>

So where do we as Unitarian Universalist fit? And what does this have to do with diversity? Stay with me for a few minutes. First, to answer the question of where we fit, I will draw heavily on the work of Ken Wilber.<sup>15</sup> The field of human development has shown that humans develop through a sequence of stages, and often these are listed vertically.<sup>16</sup> The disadvantage of that display is that it suggests a hierarchy, which is what I specifically want to avoid. Instead, take out a pen or a pencil and in the blank space on the front of your Order of Service draw a small circle, say the size of a dime, and label it “egocentric.”<sup>17</sup> [Hold up sheet one.] I don’t usually care for labeling, but there’s no way to avoid it. People at this stage of development have a first-person perspective on life—everything is about ME. The feminine type at the egocentric stage has an emphasis on care, relationship, and responsibility, but it’s selfish care and all about MY care. The masculine type has an emphasis on autonomy, justice and rights for the individual—and it’s all about MINE.<sup>18</sup>

The usual example of a person who is egocentric is an immature adolescent, but I have had conversations with people in their thirties and forties who are egocentric. They want what they want when they want it. They got arrested for drunk driving, for example, because the cops were out to get them. The fact that they were intoxicated had nothing to do with it. They literally cannot see a larger perspective.<sup>19</sup>

Now draw a second circle a bit bigger than the first, that includes all of the first circle within it. [Show sheet two.] Label the second circle ethnocentric.<sup>20</sup> Someone leaving the egocentric stage doesn’t climb a ladder; rather they transcend and include the first stage.

You'll hear those three words several more times, and they are what make this scheme not a hierarchy. People who have reached the ethnocentric stage are able to take a second-person perspective on life and events. They still have all the abilities they had at the egocentric stage, but they have transcended this limited perspective. The feminine emphasis on care, relationship, and responsibility is about OUR care—the care of the group the person is in. The male emphasis on autonomy, rights, and justice is about OUR rights, the group's autonomy, and justice for the people in the group the person is in.<sup>21</sup>

The ethnocentric stage is also characterized by an attitude of us-vs.-them. It's our group versus their group. There are myriads of such groups in the United States. In its benign form it's the San Francisco 49ers versus those nasty Oakland Raiders. Or the Sacramento Kings versus those hated Lakers. Some of this rivalry is actually a good thing: it adds spice to our life and offers a topic of conversation. At a more pernicious level it is us responsible Republicans versus those spend thrift Democrats. Or vice versa, it's us progressive Democrats against those regressive Republicans who are continually dragging their feet. At its most destructive form it's the Nazis against the *untermenschen*, or lower people. Or it's the Catholic Church against the pagans. And in these extreme forms it becomes dangerous, because the lower people are categorized as sub-human and other. Being non-human they can be exploited, forced into slave labor, or even burned at the stake.

Let's move on. Draw a third circle, larger than the second, so that it includes both of the first two, and label it worldcentric.<sup>22</sup> [Hold up sheet 3.] People reach this stage by transcending the ethnocentric stage. They include all of their previous abilities and gain new ones. They are able to take third-person perspectives on problems, and their focus is on ALL of us. The feminine emphasis on care, relationship, and responsibility is focused on

universal care or global care for ALL of human kind. The male emphasis on autonomy, rights, and justice is for universal rights for ALL humans everywhere.<sup>23</sup> These descriptors should sound familiar, because this stage is where Unitarian Universalism begins.<sup>24</sup>

A few examples from our society at large are instructive. Bi-partisan politics is only possible at the worldcentric stage of development, when the petty bickering of one political party or the other is transcended and politicians become statesmen and look to the good of the whole. People at the worldcentric level see that all of humanity is connected, and what affects me also affects you—all of you—and so we become concerned for universal health care.

It is instructive to pause here and look at the figure Jesus Christ from each of these three stages.<sup>25</sup> I have stylized these examples in order to crystallize them to a sharp focus. At the egocentric stage, Jesus is a personal savior, a magician, who can walk on water, turn water into wine, still a storm, etc, etc, and Jesus loves ME this I know, for the Bible tells ME so.

At the ethnocentric stage, Jesus is the Eternal Truth bringer, and only those who believe in Him will be saved. At this stage, the word Him is capitalized. This stage is also absolutist, so you either believe the Bible exactly as written—in English, no less, and in whatever translation your church uses—or you will spend all eternity in hell. This stage is where Fundamentalist Christianity lives.

At the worldcentric stage, Jesus Christ becomes humanized, while still fully divine. He is a teacher of universal love of a deistic God who loves everyone. This stage finds salvation through Jesus and also allows salvation through other paths.

We need to move on. Draw a fourth circle that includes the first three and label it ecocentric. [Hold up sheet four.] I invented that word just for this sermon. This stage was

begun by some of our founders, such as Walt Whitman, but it took off in 1962 when Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*. Someone reaches this stage by transcending the worldcentric stage and recognizing that not only are we connected to one another, we are also connected to nature. Unitarian Universalism's seventh principle is "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," and this community is centered here. I'm thinking of the fact, for example, that we have been recognized as a Green Sanctuary.

But let us not become smug. Remember the words of the Desiderata: "If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself." And arrogance is not an option, because there are always more stages. Draw a fifth circle that includes the first four and label it beginning integral. [Hold up sheet five.] Underline the adjective. The distinguishing feature of this stage is that a person can begin to see the structure that I've outlined. Laura Divine writes, "... higher stages ... tend to build upon or incorporate the earlier stages, no stages can be skipped, and the stages emerge in an order that cannot be altered by environmental conditioning or social reinforcement."<sup>26</sup> Stated more succinctly, there are no short cuts.<sup>27</sup>

It's pretty clear by now that these stages go on and on. So put three dots outside the fifth circle, and then draw another circle, well outside all the previous circles, and label it mysticism. [Hold up sheet six.] Rev. Meghan is going to preach on this topic next Sunday, so I'll be brief. The Spirituality Group that met last Thursday viewed the DVD *With One Voice*. Twenty-two mystics from fourteen different traditions told a portion of their stories. The bottom line message is this: "There is only one Ultimate Reality,"<sup>28</sup> and all paths lead

there. I found it sad that only three of the 22 came out of the Christian tradition: a Quaker lady and two Catholic monks.

Personally, I have developed a profound humility—being right-sized about myself. During my research for this sermon I discovered two topics that I never even heard of a month ago:<sup>29</sup> Profound topics that offer great insight about the human condition. Since I began this quest ten years ago, the more I learn, the more I discover there is to be learned.

This map you have created on your Orders of Service has great explanatory power in at least two respects. First, developmental psychologists claim that a person who lives in one of the inner circles has neither the knowledge nor the perspective to see phenomena taking place in one of the outer circles.<sup>30</sup> That sounded unduly harsh to me, until I read some of the vituperative blogs following news articles about climate change, which can only be seen at the ecocentric stage of development. Furthermore, polls suggest that roughly sixty percent of Americans do not believe in evolution, and that is because they don't have the knowledge and the perspective to see the phenomenon. *Therefore*, when one of you happens to mention to an acquaintance about the need for universal health care, for example, and that person reacts angrily, then know that you are seeing from a worldcentric perspective and your acquaintance is seeing from another perspective. Don Miguel Ruiz, in his book *The Four Agreements*, devotes an entire chapter to the topic of not taking things personally,<sup>31</sup> because, to quote Rev. Meghan last week, "It's not about you."<sup>32</sup>

I promised to say something about diversity, but I have to deliver some bad news. Suppose a visitor attends one of our services. Then the odds are three in four that Rev. Meghan will give one of her typical sermons that I personally find deeply meaningful, and most of you find the same. If that hypothetical visitor lives in a world space defined by the

inner two circles of our map, then he or she will walk out the door and say something such as, “What in the world was that lady talking about?” At the same time, I would like to believe there are hundreds of people in western Nevada County who have a world view similar to ours and who are also un-churched for any number of reasons. They would enrich our community, and we could enrich their lives. And a word of warning is appropriate: Please don’t suggest that Rev. Meghan dumb-down her sermons. We do not want to go there. I firmly believe that our best course of action is to put as much quality as we can into our programs, and then diversity will take care of itself.

Before closing, I would like to say a few words about the process of transcending and including. It begins with what Larua Divine calls the Disintegrating Phase. “A person begins to get glimpses of the limits of this level and progressively sees that there is something more beyond the confines of this view ...”<sup>33</sup> The person begins to question his or her assumptions about life, and gradually the person becomes dissatisfied with the old answers. As this process happens, the view widens, and the person can see things and events on a larger scale. There is a transition, usually gradual but sometimes sudden. In the story of Jesus in Lebanon, his transition was rather sudden. In my case, one day I woke up and realized I was no longer a Christian. Further, I realized I had not been a Christian for quite some time, but it had been such a gradual transition that I hadn’t even noticed. The process continues into what Divine calls the Wobbly Phase of the next stage. By wobbly, I mean as a new-born colt is wobbly on its legs. There is a death of the old view and a birth of the new view. In that spiritual symphony called the Gospel of John, the author describes it thusly:<sup>34</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you”—that’s an idiom, which means what I’m saying is a law of the universe. “If a man is not born again”—that’s another idiom, which means to change one’s

thoughts and habits; that is to start over. If a person does not change his or her thoughts and habits, the person “cannot see the kingdom of God.” And of course the kingdom of God is a metaphor for a new, expanded way of seeing. Divine calls the third phase in this process Solid: “A person has grown into a new view of self, others, and the world and is effectively living life from that view; it becomes so embedded that it is hard to see it when living in it.”

But the question shouts out: how does a person change his thoughts and habits? Start where you are. Do you have a book, say, that you’ve always wanted to read some day, but you’ve never quite gotten to it. Do not start with *Creation Continues*, because that was my path, and you won’t find your path by trying to follow mine. Your book will suggest another, and then another. It also helps to pay attention to what’s happening around us and take notes. When you begin to notice the day-to-day synchronicities, then you’ll know you’re making progress.

Finally, and personally, I have had glimpses of the mystical stage, and it was “Oh WOW!” My first reaction was to try to get there again. So I read and studied and tried and studied and tried some more, which only led to frustration, because it can’t be forced. This process was very messy. Eventually, as always happens, I found a story featuring a sage, and the sage said, “The next thing you’ve got to learn is to get out of your own way.”

Amen!

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**Footnotes:**

1. Fritz Kunkel, *Creation Continues, Revised Edition*, Word Books, 1973. I can't locate the exact page where I read this, but I recall that Kunkel was the one who mentioned it.
2. Matthew 15.21-28, *NRSV Harper Study Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
3. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Revised Edition, Volume 2*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 122.
4. Ibid, p. 120. See also, *The New Testament in Modern English, Revised Student Edition*, by J. B. Phillips, Touchstone, 1972, p. 32. Phillips also uses the word "right" here.
5. George M. Lamsa, *Idioms in the Bible Explained and A Key to the Original Gospel*, Harper San Francisco, 1985, p. 53.
6. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Volume One, Revised*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 172 and John 4.9.
7. Mark 6.39.
8. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*, p. 126.
9. John 6.15.
10. See footnote 8.
11. Matthew 15.31.
12. Mark 8.6. See also, Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*, p. 126.
13. Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketchem, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness*, Bantam Books, 1994, p. 114.
14. Ibid, p. 115.
15. Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*, Integral Books, 2006, Chapters 2 and 4.

16. Ibid, for example, the figures inserted between pages 68 and 69.
17. Ibid, p. 51.
18. Laura Divine, "A Unique View into You: Working with a Client's AQAL Constellation," *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* **4**, no. 1 (Spring 2009) p. 48. See also p. 58 for a tabular comparison of the two gender types.
19. While difficult to accept, this concept is vitally important to understanding human development and behavior. See Wilber's *Integral Spirituality*.
20. See footnote 17.
21. See footnote 18.
22. See footnote 17.
23. See footnote 18.
24. William G. Sinkford, Editor, *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, Fourth Edition*, Skinner House Books, 2004, p. vii, specifically principles 1 – The inherent worth and dignity of every person; 2 – Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; and 6 – The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.
25. Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, p. 92 for all three of these caricatures.
26. L. Divine, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
27. Matthew Wilson-Daley, personal communication, September 28, 2009.
28. Carol Flickstein, *With One Voice: A Companion Guide to Facilitate Group Discussion and Personal Reflection*, The Forest Way, 2009, p. 10.
29. The two topics are the Enneagram and the metaphoric process. See *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* **4**, no. 1 (Spring 2009). Page 66 lists five books about the Enneagram, and page 92 lists two books about the metaphoric process.

30. Wilber makes this point several times in *Integral Spirituality*.
31. Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book*, Amber-Allen, 1997, chapter 3 beginning on page 47.
32. Rev. Meghan Cefalu, “Wrestling with Forgiveness,” a sermon given to the Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains, September 27, 2009.
33. Divine, *op. cit.*, p. 53 and 54. The discussion in this paragraph is deduced from her Figure 7, “Phases within a level.”
34. John 3.3.