

Anchor Notes for the Greenfield Group
April 26&27, 2004
Scribe: Ann Fox

Thoughts on Kendra Ford's Paper
"Theological Meanderings..." and Fred Gillis' Response

Nina: Both papers say the Protestant tradition influences us and this influence is from the Bible. However, how can we include the Jews in this since they have the tradition of the Talmud, which integrates many texts?

Kendra: [We are influenced] by *living here*. We're living in the Protestant culture. Even though we're not Protestant, Judaism has been Protestantized, at least in this country. Sanders talks of the nuanced focus of Jewish words.

Dick: In the book *Out of the Flames* about Servetus, Servetus makes nasty comments about Calvin's writing. He makes jokes about serious theological matters. Calvin is humorless.

Charles: From the Lutheran tradition, there is a lot of humor even though they were Protestants.

Anita: Martin Marty's book on Luther talks of humor. Luther said, "If there was no humor in heaven, he didn't want to go there."

Brian: Jewish humor is often self-deprecating.

Frank Hall: He showed us a book called *Laughter in Hell* which is about humor in the Holocaust, humor to survive the absurdity of Nazi life. Frank's wife was interested when she found out the author was Jewish.

Frank watched only one episode of "Southpark," which happened to be about Gibson's [The Passion of the Christ] film—the absurdity of it. It helped him laugh at the film finally, putting it into an acceptable perspective.

Bob: In a change of subject: Religious humor is an underground rebellion about the faith. Jokes were always at the expense of women or an ethnic group. I was down on humor for some years because of this.

Naneen: [To Bob] "Sorry we dumped on you all these years! In the Sanders book, I was surprised laughter was equated with sin and the devil.

Fred: About "putdown" humor: the TV program 'Cheers' did a lot of this.

Will: We struggled to pull together a diverse reading list because there isn't a lot out there. It's very hard to *write* about humor because it is often pertinent to the moment.

Anita: There are many forms of humor, like in theatre, with religious themes.

Charles: I agree that we must be aware of the moment when humor is experienced.

Bob: [Picking up on Charles' comment] A joke expressed requires a "funny streak." I experienced two naturally funny guys from England during a wedding. The Bride's mother started pounding out "God Save the Queen." The two stood up all of a sudden and then noticed no one else was standing. The joke was on them.

Frank (Carpenter?): [In another matter] I need help in getting information for a talk on an ethical topic that I'm thinking of doing on "Humor as a Moral Imperative." All comments on Calvin's lack of humor to Frank please.

Nina: Not all laughter has a context. Her grandchild laughs spontaneously when her father holds her upside down. We may be hard-wired for fun!

Frank Carpenter: Freedom: there's a basic experience of freedom in laughter.

Rosemary: When my son, Daniel, was a baby, he laughed in his sleep. Also, there's a cultural divide in what's funny. I can't find any black folks who find Seinfeld funny.

Bob: I began to understand the derisive humor in the minstrel show? I vowed to never do them again.

Nina: I felt the Kohn book was narrowly focused and left out whole populations, like Latinos.

Josh: In conflict management seminars, humor is used to break tension and build morale.

Brian: I don't care for put-down humor, but UUs self-putdowns are usually funny.

Charles: Emergency Room gallows humor is often helpful.

Will to Nina: In the grandchild story, the delight of the child is connected to joy, *mirth*.

Thoughts on the Short Paper of Charles Stephens

Anita: I feel angry when the preacher puts in jokes that are not related to the sermon, just to get a laugh but with no real connection.

Kendra: I tell humorous stories and I make fun of my own perceptions. I notice how the quality of listening changes after laughter.

Naneen: They [her congregation] know I *always* put something humorous in my sermon. So they pay attention so as not to miss it.

Frank: When an old guy fell asleep and snored during the service, I told a joke so everyone would laugh and wake him up.

Tom: The physiology of laughter opens a spiritual dimension in people.

Charles: Herbert Benson says that laughter and humor are connected to the relaxation response. Maybe singing comes close.

Josh: I notice that humor can go over differently in the first and second services. It could be the younger crowd at the first service relates more.

Will: We have a similar experience with their two services.

Brian: I use a lot of humor. It gets people in a deeper space. Most of it is off the cuff and I have to censor it out.

Fred: I'm concerned that adults laugh at children's comments. It's not good for the children.

Thoughts on the Short Paper of Susan Suchocki (“Humor, Humility, & Humanity”)

Kendra: I find that memorial services sometimes evoke weird laughter and giggles. Perhaps it is a way of handling loss and pain.

Charles: I think that sometimes people dealing with serious illnesses like cancer find relief in humor and it helps to give perspective.

Susan: Mental health professionals determine the “mental status” of a person by asking questions like “What is a pig?”

Frank: Humor can help in therapy. I recall Carl Rogers' words, “Therapy is a special instance of all relationships.”

Brian: In a memorial service, laughter helps the grief process.

Bob: With prisoners [in his prison ministry], I had them talk about what they'd done. I told them, “It could've been worse. Look at so and so.”

Dick: It's interesting that humor and tears come out of the same place in the brain; laughter turns to tears.

Nina: Parents of a 1-1/2 year old boy who died talked of his sense of humor in mimicking them.

Thoughts on Josh's paper: “Towards Justice with Humor”

Susan: I appreciate the prophetic jester.

Josh: I encountered lots of humor in resistance to same sex marriage. It was good to find humor helped in interfaith understanding.

Brian: Humor helped with the police in the recent Quebec City demonstration.

Bob: There was no humor at all in the Massachusetts State House during the three days of debate—no redemptive laughter.

Tom: There was a good opportunity to show the absurdity of opposing same sex marriage.

Gayle: There was a lot of humor in Salem about all the things we can't change the Constitution for.

Martha: On *Prairie Home Companion*, he said, "Haven't you heard that gays want to marry?" Response: "Haven't they suffered enough?!"

Susan asked rhetorically: How *can* we help transform society?

Frank: Have you seen the sign "Don't iron while the strike is hot!"?

Gayle: I wonder whether humor has helped gays and lesbians *bear* it all.

Nina: There is a transformation potential in humor. We should be conscious of it because we all swim in a stream of many oppressions.

Kendra: But we have to set boundaries around humor.

Charles ended with: Humor can sustain life in times of hopelessness. Peasants say: keep on going on.