

## 46th Storyworth: Do You Believe In A Higher Power?

I am reminded of something I first heard when Bill Clinton was President, but it might even be more applicable under Joe Biden for reasons which might become obvious if one has been paying attention. Anyway, the President is on a worldwide trip which includes much of Europe, and he arrives at London. There he is ushered in to meet the Prime Minister, who happens to be with the Queen at the moment. Since the President's cell phone is a US Only unit, he asks if he can borrow the Queen's Gold landline so he can seek the advice of his god. Since he is such a good Catholic, and she assures him it will connect by her "divine right of royalty".

He is offered the phone, but instructed that calls to heaven cost \$1 Billion per minute or part thereof. Being the President, he understands that some things simply cost what they cost, but their value is priceless, and that such advice as he might hope for or expect is of that nature. So he spends a little over three minutes asking for advice on handling the Pandemic and trying to mend the divide in our country. And he has Janet Yellen write a check for the \$4 Billion to the Bank of England.

His next stop is France, where Macron is not thrilled to see him, as if any Frenchman ever would be. But, while there, he notices another Gold Phone, so he inquires, and is informed that France is a devout Christian country, and that the phone does connect to god, but that it will cost \$1 Billion Euros per minute or part therefore. Even Joe Biden knows how currencies fluxuate, but right now that is well more than a Billion dollars. Still, he realizes that the prior advice he got was perhaps not as clear as he might have hoped, so he asks to use the phone again, and spends just over \$6 Billion there.

His next stop is The Vatican, and being the good Catholic he is, the Pope welcomes him with open arms. However, there is another Gold Phone sitting there, and when The President inquires, he is informed that the Church can only accept payments in the form of untaxable properties, artworks, and bonds, which must be drawn on a Swiss Bank and handled by the Pope's military, which are after all Swiss Guards, and the value exceeds \$2 Billion per minute. But with the Pandemic cases still rising, there seems little alternative to seeking divine assistance. So another \$8 Billion is arranged with the US Treasury. And Biden leaves with an air of confidence that his religious beliefs will be vindicated if he can stem the pandemic.

His next stop is Weissach, in Germany, which is the home of the Porsche AG Engineering and Development Center, where he is met by the Chairman of Volkswagen, which now owns Porsche. Mr. Biden is somewhat surprised to see another Gold Phone on the desk, and so asks whether it can be used to call The Almighty. He is informed that it gets used a lot for exactly the purpose. So, since he has the opportunity, he asks to use it as well. But he is told it will be a toll call. However, he is surprised to be told the charge will be a quarter per minute. When he explains how much it cost in the other three locations, the Porsche Executives are bemused, and they inform him that from Weissach, it is a local call.

While I PRACTICE the tenets of the Christian Faith generally as it reflects my relationship to my fellow man, I seriously doubt ANYONE would consider me to be religious. And CERTAINLY not a follower of any specific organized sect, at least since I learned in the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade from my History Teacher Al Vinck what a horrid abuser of power EVERY religion except possibly Buddhist has been when presented the opportunity. And even they have some draconian dogma which seems to be ridiculous to me. How can religious "leaders" seem to claim such morality while their histories have represented precisely the opposite of my understanding of the supposed teachings of their Christ as far as the treatment of other human beings? And any honest reading of "The Bible" would suggest that THAT god is a cruel and vindictive bastard.

Add to that the evidence, and I AM a logically driven user of evidence in making most of the decisions affecting my life, that people replace intellect with “faith” even when their intellectual understanding of circumstance cannot possibly come to the conclusion their faith is expecting of them. Take for example the oft-heard prayers for the speedy recovery from some malady by the faithful, while NOBODY seems to ask why any god who has that much power would have allowed the problem in the first place. Do I really matter?

Similarly, if there has been ANY constant in the human experience, it has been our seemingly insatiable need to kill others of our species in the most grotesque ways possible. We put WAY too much intellectual effort into such development, and only as an aside do we use much of that to develop ways in which we actually progress mankind. Yet we presume to refer to ourselves as the “highest order life form”. NO other life form gets even close to our record for self destruction. So exactly where is the “higher” of this supposed power?

I guess in summary my thinking on “a higher power” is to look at the immenseness and complexity that is the universe, and ask “Why?” and “What about before?” and see where that takes me. As I understand it, the “Big Bang Theory” sees the universe as currently still expanding, but having done so for the past some billions of years. OK. So what happened before THAT? I cannot explain why a universe might exist, but if there is a purpose to it, it is far beyond mortal man comprehension, which puts it in the realm of “supernatural”, so can only be understood in a “faith” context, even if many of its laws might seem rational, which is the case.

What I do NOT believe is that ANY faith-based beliefs of mine should seem more nor less valuable than similarly held beliefs of any other rational person looking at the same evidence. I am very aware that some people with very logical minds nonetheless have a cultural preference for some form of religious belief, maybe because of societal pressure for conformity. But my personal observation is that figures may not lie, but that liars figure, and that history has proven beyond doubt that agendas are definitely created by very mortal beings.

I have often heard it suggested that it makes sense to believe in a god, if only because if you are wrong the consequences could be dire. But that again suggests that the god who might exist would be a vengeful being, while my lack of confidence is based primarily on the very fact of those inconsistencies between the projection of a loving parent and those of a punisher. And I see no way to reconcile those distinctions.

Similarly, however, I see no real way to explain any of the vastness which is clearly observable by me, and why that might exist unless there actually IS some purpose, even if that purpose is only to make us have to think through why and how things might be as they are, and whether I might actually matter at all anyway. Because the empirical evidence says that I really am NOT the center of the universe, nor should I be. I am simply one individual who is amazed by what I observe in nature and am open to learning more about why that nature might exist as it does. In so doing, I am probably more aware, than say a honeybee, which seems more to be merely a worker in the grand scheme, while I perceive my existence to be expected to think beyond that.

And if my thinking alone makes me a “higher being”, then my failure to think and to doubt whatever does not follow from that empirical evidence logically makes me suspect as a witness, whatever religion I might profess. So I must profess that I consider anyone who does NOT question those relationships, accepting ANY dogma as being inevitable or incontrovertible merely on the basis of faith, is failing to USE the very brains which MY faith deems me to have been “given” by whatever supreme being did so, precisely because she wanted me to demonstrate that THINKING is why I was placed with this existence in the first place. And I think that means I must see that as a purpose for MY life at least, which is pretty much how to explain my religion ;-)

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