

Credo: I Believe

H. Stephen Shoemaker

May 14, 2018

Today I will offer my personal credo, my “I believe.” William Sloane Coffin writes: “Credo—I believe—best translates ‘I have given my heart to.’” It is therefore it is an exercise of both mind and heart.

Faith itself is deeper than “beliefs”. It has to do with words like trust, confidence, wonder, loyalty and engagement. But it necessarily includes beliefs, so today’s sermon. Beliefs give form and confidence to our faith. They are always growing and changing, as with the man in Mark’s gospel who cried, “I believe; help thou my unbelief”.

O.T. scholar G.W. Anderson wrote an article “Israel’s Creed: Sung not Signed.” Our faith is more a song to be sung than a legal document to be signed.

Jews sing their Credo every week in worship, the *Shema*:

Shema Israel	Hear O Israel,
Adonai Eloheinu	The Lord is our God
Adonai Echad	The Lord is One.

Then right after come the words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Another way of saying it is that *theology is doxology*, the praise of God with our minds and hearts.

What follows is my working personal credo, what I have given my heart to as one on a journey with Jesus toward God, with God, into God.

.....

I believe in the oneness of God,

therefore we and all the world can be one.

I believe that God is the creator of all that is,

so life itself is a miracle and gift.

I believe in the Mystery of God

Whom we know and do not know

Who has revealed God’s own self in Jesus Christ

yet is always partly revealed and partly hidden

The story is told of a spiritual master who spoke of the unknowability of God:

“Everything we say of God is a distortion of the truth”, he said. “Then why do we speak of God?”, the student asked. The master replied, “Why does the bird sing?”

So we sing of God whom we know and do not know.

I believe in Jesus of Nazareth,

The Word and Wisdom of God made flesh

The Speaking of God and *Hochma*, daughter of God incarnate.

Who is my Center and Living One

“genuine humanity and genuine divine presence” who has made God known and shown us the face of God.

Who is Christ and Lord to me,

“Surprise of Mercy, outgoing Gladness, Healing and Life. (G.A. Buttrick)

And I am just beginning.

I believe that he taught and healed in the presence and power of God, that he brought the reign of God near in his preaching, teaching, touching, healing and simple friendship.

I believe the kingdom of God came near

in his welcome of all people

poor and rich, righteous and sinner, sick and well, tax-collector, prostitute, Pharisee, Samaritan, children, women, Roman soldier, Canaanite woman alike, the little ones, the least of these, and those that had lost their way.

And that we enter the kingdom

as a child, or not at all

With the all-out wonder and all out need of a child.

I believe that his teaching and healing

led to a religious and political crisis which brought about his death on a Roman cross.

I believe that his death was a free-act

for us and all the world and that this “for-ness has brought the miracle of forgiveness and reconciliation with God, oneself and others.

I believe that his death, along with his life,

revealed the heart of God from the beginning: a divine self giving for the sake of our flourishing and for the *shalom*, peace, wholeness of the world

I believe that God raised Jesus from the grave

To be the risen, Living One

and that Christ calls us to the “Christs” in the world: “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.”

As Hopkins wrote:

“For Christ plays in ten thousand places
Lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his
Through the features of men’s faces.” (And women’s)

I believe in the Resurrection

and its message that life is stronger than death and that love is stronger than all the evil the world can muster.

I believe in the final resurrection for us all

into the eternal arms of God.

and in daily resurrection from death to life, as Christ “easters in us”

(Hopkins) and we “practice resurrection” (W. Berry)

I believe in the Holy Spirit

the Divine Breath we breathe

whose breath is life to us.

I believe the Divine Spirit is present immediately to all people

and cannot be controlled by hierarchies and authorities.

I believe that the work of the Spirit is *unity in reconciled diversity*.

And that the fruit of the Spirit is nine:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

and that six out of nine on any day is pretty good.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is, to use a Celtic image,

A Wild Goose, who leads us out to where we most need to go and where God most needs for us to go.

So *courage* is a fruit of the Spirit too.

I believe in Original Blessing, not Original Sin,

and therefore in our original and essential goodness.

So we are all born mystics, in oneness with God,

and that our spiritual quest and calling is to discover and to enjoy this oneness.

I believe that sin is a distortion of our original goodness

and that it estranges us from God, self and others.

I believe that sin is more than deeds

but is also a malignant spiritual power which diminishes and destroys us
and which damages the world in which we live.

I believe that sin is strong, but grace is stronger

so we should not despair but avail ourselves of grace.

I believe that we can lose our way so badly

that we cannot find our way back home on our own, and that the grace of
God comes to find us and lead us home.

I believe that this grace came and comes in Christ

I believe in the world to come, eternal life,

the Final Healing and Great Homecoming.

“Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.”

I believe that there is in us all

“ a hidden wholeness” (T. Merton)

And that our life-long quest is to discover this wholeness and live it to the
fullest possible measure until that day when “all shall be well

and all shall be well and
all manner of life shall be well.” (Julian of Norwich)

I believe that children “are soulful in ways that they themselves reveal” (R. Coles)
and that it is our duty and delight to pay attention to and nurture their
soulfulness.

I believe that we are all soulful in ways only we ourselves can reveal
and that in spiritual community we pay attention to and nurture each
other’s soulfulness.

I believe that creation itself is soulful.

So all life is holy,
and that creation reveals its soulfulness
and if we pay attention
we will see the holy in all things.

Yes, “the world is charged with the grandeur of God.” (Hopkins)
and “earth’s crammed with heaven
and every common bush afire with God” (E.B. Browning)

So it is left to us, like Moses,

To turn aside long enough to see.

I believe that every moment of truth, beauty and goodness

Is an inbreaking of the Divine in our lives.

So we are called to “Give beauty back,

beauty, beauty, beauty back to God

beauty, self and beauty’s giver (Hopkins).

And that the same applies to truth and goodness:

Give it back...Give it on!

I believe that the presence and power of evil

Is a distortion of what is good

and that it can take over persons

groups, institutions and nations.

So we must recognize our own capacity for evil

And be vigilant about its presence in the world.

But evil, I believe, does not have the last word,

the best is not at the mercy of the worst,

The Mystery of Good outweighs the Mystery of Evil.

I believe in the in the interconnectedness of life

that we are “members of one another”
in the Body of Christ and in the human family.

I believe that this interconnectedness applies

To the full realm of reality,
our vast Web of Being.

So we are interconnected

spiritually, communally, ecologically, politically. Touch the web one place
and the whole web trembles.

I believe this to be the fullest meaning of ecumenical,

the whole inhabited earth as the household of God.

I believe in the plenitude and generosity

of the universe and of God
so we should live gratefully and generously.

I believe that the church is

the assuredly broken yet being redeemed people of God, guided and formed
by Christ and that its most essential calling is *the increase in the of love* of
God and neighbor.

I believe that the care of creation

Is a form of the love of God and neighbor.

I believe that life's most important decision

is to enter the kingdom of God, to be partners with God in God's great

Work:

justice, joy, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation,

all marks of salvation.

I believe that faith dwells

in what it knows and does not know and is able to live

in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (Keats).

I believe that the opposite of faith is not doubt

But fear, and its running mate, certainty.

And that certainty, disguised as faith,

is a danger to both soul and society.

In the phrase "dead certain", the operative word is "dead".

I believe that there is far more we cannot control

than what we can
so that one dimension of faith is letting go, a relinquishment
of our illusion of control.

I believe that deepest faith is not

A believing *this* or *that*—despite the form of this sermon--
but a believing *in* or *into*, which is formed in relationship with God, Christ
and Spirit.

Therefore faith is deeper than beliefs, creeds, doctrines

and closer to words like trust, confidence, loyalty, wonder and engagement.

I believe that the “greatest of these is love”

and that it is more than individual.

Justice is its social form

and peace is the proof

that love and justice have kissed

and dwell together for the healing of the world.

I believe that laughter is medicine for the soul.

It is “carbonated holiness”, to quote Anne Lamott.

Laughter, the healing kind, lets us live more easily with our own humanity

and that of others. Laughter reminds us that we are dust, but are “beloved dust.” We all slip on some banana peel.

I believe that grace is the first and last word

of our existence as children of God
and that finally “all is grace”
and “grace is all”. (George Bernanos)

I believe that when we lose our hold

we are held,

That “the Eternal God is our dwelling place

and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.”

This is the God I have given my heart to

It is somedays a believing

in spite of conditions

and in spite of what I feel

Thus somedays I say, “Nevertheless, I believe.”

It is a believing in or into God

Who is closer to me than I am to myself.

So I end my credo with a poem by Mark Van Doren:

“Psalm 11”

As near as the south wind on my cheek--
Nothing, I thought once, could lie closer,
But I was wrong, dear Lord, I was wrong—

As near as the lips of them I love--
Nothing, I said, could ever be sweeter,
But that was before I had tasted this—

As near as the blood in my own heart--
What more certainly at the center?
But something else is, wait til I tell you—

As near as the air I displace
Yet some of it enters—no, not that...
You know, my Lord, who is worlds away
Yet here, yet here where I have my being--
You know that singeth, not I, this song.

