

Credo by Lincoln Baxter-October 2017

In 1970, at least 14 years before the Seven Principles were adopted, and probably 15 or 16 years before the "Six Sources of Our Religious Tradition" were formulated, I wrote and submitted to my Draft Board:

“Basically, every experience is a religious experience in one way or another, because for me religion is a daily affair and not just confined to Sunday. Everything that has happened to me has influenced my belief...”

This was on my application for Conscientious Objector status. I was responding to the second of two questions on the petition:

"Explain how, when, and from whom or from what source, you received the religious training and acquired the religious belief which is the basis of your claim."

I find it interesting how what I wrote in 1970 above mirrors the first of the "Six Sources of Our Religious Tradition" which reads, the "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;" You can find the Six Sources on UUA website along with our 7 Principles.

Some background...

My Dad was at least a fourth generation Boston Unitarian... And my Mom's parents generation, German immigrants all, to a person left the Catholic Church. Most became Unitarians.

My Dad met my Mom at a Boston Outing Club excursion in 1949. Dad was working at Polaroid Land, after refusing a terminal Masters degree from Cornell. I don't know why my Mom ended up in Boston after completing a Master's in Experimental Psychology at Duke. But, what is clear is that after being told by her father, that women didn't need to go to college because they are just going to become broodmares, she became one of the most highly educated women of her day. My parents were married by the Rev Kenneth Patton in Boston in 1950. (You will find a number of readings he authored in our Hymnal.)

When I was four and a half, my Dad took a job at the the Wood Hole Oceanographic Institution in Woods Hole (on Cape Cod) and bought a house in Falmouth. This was 45 minutes from the nearest Unitarian Church, which was in Barstable. In the great schizism of the Puritan Church in New England in the early 19th Century, the white church on the Falmouth town green had gone the other way... and became part of the United Church of Christ.

So, when I was about 7 or so, my Mom advertised in the paper for people interested in starting a Unitarian group in Falmouth. The original group was about 10-12 families. They were scientists, doctors, and educators. They originally met in my parent's living room. They wanted a local liberal religious education for their children that did not require a 45 minute drive across the Cape to Barstable.

I remember learning Old Testament Bible stories on Sunday mornings when I was in Second or Third grade. Much time was spent on the Old Testament and a lot of emphasis was given to the Ten Commandments. In fact, my parents made me and my brother memorize them.

Sometime before I was in 6th grade, the Unitarian Fellowship of Falmouth agreed with the West Falmouth Society of Friends to put a bathroom into the old West Falmouth meeting house, in return for a meeting space for worship. That relationship continued with the installation of heat, and a second bathroom. In the process, the Unitarian Fellowship of Falmouth rejuvenated a dying Quaker Meeting. At the time, the agreement was that the Unitarians would vacate the meeting house by the time the Friends met at 11:00 on Sunday mornings, so the Unitarians met at 9:00. The Unitarians also rented space for Sunday school in the West Falmouth Library which was

across the street. That Fellowship has since built a church with over 250 members. My parents ashes lie in their memorial garden...

But I digress...

In 6th or 7th grade, we read Sophia Lyon Fahs' "Jesus the Carpenter's Son" in Sunday school. It focused on the Humanity of Jesus, and not his divinity. I still think it is a good Sunday school text. I remember in junior high, a curriculum called "The Church Across The Street" where we were asked to look at what other churches believed and attend one of each's services. We went to most of the churches in Falmouth... And I realized we were being asked to consider what we believed with the knowledge of the beliefs of others... I started to understand Unitarianism as distinguished from Trinitarianism. We didn't reject the Bible, we reinterpreted it.

At the end of my Freshman year in HS, I went to my first Star Island Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) conference. Star Island is 10 miles off Portsmouth NH, and jointly owned by the the UCC and the UUA. The two church's split a 10 week summer calendar. The week long summer programs there are the equivalent of what the Mountian or SUUSI is here. It was at Star Island I first became aware of the the counter culture and the Vietnam War. When I showed up that first year I still had a crew cut -- not the second year.

Buy the time I was graduating from HS I had decided that I would apply to my draft board for conscientious objector status. This was a draft board that was notoriously unfriendly to CO applications. I want to read to you more of what I wrote in 1970... It is largely my Credo to this day.

There were two questions on the petition that I had to respond to.

The first was:

"Describe the nature of your belief which is the basis of your claim, and state why you consider it to be based on religious training and belief."

In part, I wrote:

“In the Unitarian Universalist faith (I am Unitarian) the worship service is the celebration of life. To me, “God” is a spirit that exists in life and nature. All people and all living things have this spirit or divinity within them. The way to come into unity or communion with God is through love. In loving others, that which is divine in me joins or comes into communion with that which is divine in others.

"The part of God that is within me is what the Quakers call the "inner light." It is this inner light which supplies me with hope, and with that hope, the will to live. This inner light tells me what is right or wrong by speaking through my conscience. Hence, when I do something wrong, my conscience "bothers" me until I have righted that deed.

"To me there are two sets of "laws" which are divine. These are the laws of nature and the laws which men have found over the centuries to be most meaningful and helpful for maintaining man's love relationship with (others). To me the Commandments "Thou shalt honor thy parents; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not bear false witness; and thou shalt not covet... are such laws. Both in Sunday School, where most of the time was spent on the Old Testament, and at home, these Commandments were especially emphasized. In order to love, these laws must be obeyed.

"In church and at home, Jesus' teaching and way of life were emphasized as a prime example of the ideal relationship (love) of man to man. To me, Jesus was in unity with God through his love of men. Among Jesus' more famous statements, or guidelines, or "laws" which I must follow are, "Love thine enemy," love thy

neighbor as thyself,” “. . . . turn the other cheek,” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

“These “Laws,” which are derived from my religious training, experience, and belief, are what govern my life. It is when I violate these laws in particular, that my conscience bothers me. To me, war, and participation in war not only contradict God’s laws, but are a direct violation of God’s being. It is because of this belief in God as a spirit existent in nature and man, and the laws of love which are a consequence, that I am led to the position I am taking: I cannot, for reasons of religious training and belief, conscientiously participate in war in any form at any time.”

This has pretty much been my Credo, for the last 45 years... After graduating from HS, didn't really go to church for 20 years... I joke that my UU religious education was so good I didn't need to go to church. Then my son came home from daycare on Good Friday, talking about Jesus rising on Sunday, and I knew we needed to find a Church. I've been involved ever since. I'm glad the Church was there for me, when I came back. I hope it is there for our children and grand children when they decide to come back.

Recently, in the last one plus years, as a member of your board, we have discussed the meaning of our 25 year vision, and we have

discussed the events of a year ago -- Charlotte uprising. For several years now we have watched as police kill people of color with impunity.

If have become acutely aware of my privilege -- my white privilege. I have been doing a lot of soul searching. I recognize it, that I can't change it, I can't appologize for it, and I can't undo it... But I've come to the conclusion that I can use it... for justice. I will be retiring soon, and will have more time on my hands. I plan to use my whiteness to support those who've not had my advantages, and are infact suffering injustices every day. This is becoming one of the things I know I will be doing, as I attempt to make my faith matter.