

Dean Credo Statement

I joined Vanessa and Tuli's excellent build-your-own-theology class because of a nagging feeling that my spiritual life was "on empty," a result of my leaving my childhood church well after my 50th birthday. What I have discovered to my surprise is that I had more of a base to build on than I expected, that my reconstructed belief system was already half built and that the course help me to draw this out and to add new features. I now have a sense that my spiritual life is becoming almost as full as it was before, but now with content that is more personal and satisfying. Not that I feel spiritually whole, far from it, but that I am at the point of having a more personal and internally consistent belief system, which could be called my credo.

First in my credo is a belief in a divine force. I don't understand this force any more than I understand the forces that bring sub-atomic particles together or are expanding the universe or that are at the core of quantum mechanics, but I sense that there is an order to the various lines of force and a tendency towards organization and harmonization that suggest a benign power. My earliest ideas of God were of a white bearded anthropomorphic father figure who I could reach out to through prayer (using a set formula). As I grew older I increasingly found that this formula did not work for me – I could not feel a connection to that divine figure and I worried about how often my prayers boiled down to asking for

favours. With my changed sense of God as a divine or benign force, I have changed my terms of engaging it. Now my efforts are to try to tap into that benign force, which sometimes I feel happens spontaneously (through grace) or through spiritual practices: reading, meditating, listening to inspiring music, being in nature (especially high mountains), and taking a hot shower (with the massage setting). I know that I am connected when I also feel the benign force in me (once as a missionary in Brasil I became filled with a strong sense of compassion for all creatures) or a rush of inspiration or a clarity of mind or feelings of love and tenderness.

In my credo I also believe in salvation, but with a new twist. What I have come to understand has its roots in what my liberal Mormon mentor at Stanford taught about the center piece of salvation, ATONEMENT. He broke ATONEMENT into its three syllables AT-ONE-MENT, and taught that we should strive for at-one-ness (wholeness or integrity) within ourselves, with others and with GOD. Concerning at-one-ment within ourselves, I believe that a central feature of salvation is to achieve harmony between mind, body and spirit, by, for example, living in a way consistent with our values, or (ironically) by losing ourselves in the service of others. Forrest Church, near the end of his life, talked about this in another way: finding peace in finishing unfinished business. This leads me to the atonement task with respect to others: namely living harmoniously with them despite differences, and, again, it means at least finishing unfinished work with those where estrangement has set in. Finally, concerning

atonement with God, this goes back to my credo statement about God as a benign force. As I try to tap into that force, I can become connected to it or even at one with it, and from this also comes a sense of wholeness and joy. Salvation, and since the benign force is eternal in nature: eternal salvation.