

Do UU's Need a Creed? FEBRUARY 16, 2025

By Henry Howell

Opening Words

[extra ecclesiam nulla salus](#) ("There is no salvation outside the Church")

[Chanting – without English translation]

1. Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem cæli et terræ, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

*I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth
of all things visible and invisible.*

2. Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, Filium Dei Unigenitum, et ex Patre natum ante omnia sæcula.

*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.*

3. Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero,
genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri.

*God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God,
Begotten, not made: consubstantial with the Father.*

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**Recording** by monks to finish Henry's chant of Catholic Mass Credo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbdGVgsvNeU&t=16s>

*Begin U-Tube at recording counter #343*

*[Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.*

*Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. Et  
expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi.  
Amen.]*

*And in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church  
I confess one Baptism for the remission of sins. And  
I look for the resurrection of the dead, and of the life of the world to come.  
Amen.*

## WORDS FOR REFLECTION

### The Nicene Creed

*I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.*

. . .

## THE MESSAGE

### INTRODUCTION

*[Singing]*

What's it all about, Alfie?  
Is it just for the moment we live? ...

*[Talking]*

This is the eternal quest for all humanity, and we humans have done well in creating guidance to achieve an answer to this question. We have been given many forms of 'creeds' and "Right Ways to Believe" that, by following them, we will achieve resolution to this enduring question. Is there another approach to this philosophical and religious approach than having it given to us by a single authority or sage?

Although Unitarian Universalism has its roots in Christian-Protestant religion, it was considered heretical in the 16<sup>th</sup> century because it did not accept the holy trinity and

belief that hell awaits those who sin. This resulted in several of its originators, including Michael Servetus of Spain, being burned at the stake. Unitarian Universalism also did not accept that only one creed or doctrine could state what and how one must believe, but that people could, like the Hindus, bring many different faiths to its place of worship.

What I would like to consider in this Service:

1. First, The popularity of religious groups who have a single well-defined creed, gospel, holy book, or figure as their core set of beliefs:
  1. [Message: Cars in the parking lot]
2. Second, What spiritual and psychological resources can help us in times of civil stress or personal anxiety when, *so to speak*, “the going gets rough”.
3. And third, Do Unitarian Universalists need a “creed”, *that is*, a set manner of beliefs that would provide them, as with most other religions, a much more tangible and solid guidance, a “rock”, for their spirituality to hold onto during life’s significant challenges --and simply day to day living?

## MAIN TOPIC

So let’s take the first consideration: *Popularity of religious groups who have a single well-defined creed, gospel, holy book, or figure as their core set of beliefs.* This includes Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, folk worship and most other religious groups.

What is striking about such groups, mostly Christian, and those locally within our OWN neighborhoods --such as the Baptists, or Catholics, Presbyterians, Evangelicals, and Jehovah’s Witnesses-- is that their parking lots are FULL every Sunday with hardly a space left!

What gives here? Why is the Stone Chapel parking lot not overflowing with enthusiastic UU’s?

It is perhaps a reflection of the times, but having something spiritually very specific, easy to grasp with many physical symbols to give it identity, can be especially inviting and comforting. For example, having a creed or doctrine that says, “This is THE path to follow”, having one-and-only book of spirituality to guide you, such as the Christian’s ‘Bible’ or Moslem’s ‘Koran’; the Hindus Bhagavad Gītā; the Buddhists ‘Canon Sutras’, or the Taoists ‘Tao Te Ching’; --having physical symbols like a cross that is omnipresent and shows your faith throughout the land, or the Buddhist dharma wheel, the Jewish Star of David, or Hindus ‘Om’; having a standard set of melodies, that is hymns or chants, that are refrains in your mind; having repetition during services of doctrine of belief; and having a single almighty being that controls our existence and with whom we can speak to and may even respond to us....

Certainly, one of the most beautiful, reassuring sections of the Christian Bible is the 23 Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd.  
I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
for the sake of His name.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

[Pause]

So eloquently phrased and heartening to help us get through the many difficulties we face throughout our lives...

[Pause]

You can see what all these religious groups have in common --A single, well-defined creed, or set of rules, often a holy book, often a leading figure representing their core set of beliefs, and typically a method and style of worship.

So, would it help us UU's to have such ritual, such core manners of worship, and single "path" to follow to find redemption? Based on the attendance at so many Christian churches around us, it might well result in finding parking spaces at our own church (chapel) harder to find....

But let's consider some other aspects of the human mind in developing faith and spirituality.

This brings up consideration #2: *What spiritual and psychological resources can help us in times of civil stress or personal anxiety, "when the going gets rough".*

There is much research in the field of psychology to indicate that a strong religious belief and faith in a god can help us humans at *all* times of our lives, especially in stressful situations.

Take for example, those in California suddenly left completely homeless by wildfires, or the undocumented immigrants who for years have made their life in the US and now are thrown into, essentially, oblivion. – What will keep their emotional state positive. Can religion comfort them in such a crisis? Where will YOU and ME find solace and life affirming support during times like those?

According to studies by psychologist Kenneth Pargament<sup>1</sup>, whose research and book, *'The Psychology of Religion and Coping'* describes how religious belief influences mental and physical health:

"Among the various coping methods, religious and spiritual coping has gained considerable attention in psychological research due to its profound impact on emotional well-being, especially during periods of significant life stress."

Thomas Plante, PhD, a professor of psychology at Santa Clara University, writes, "Religion has been helping people get through hard times for thousands of years. It's tested and ready to go at a moment's notice. Just read the psalms and you will see that it is all about people turning to God during troubled times."<sup>2</sup>

And researchers Shereen Metry, Esben Strodl, & Amina Sadia from the School of Psychology at Queensland University, Australia<sup>3</sup> recently published results from their studies and concluded:

"Our model indicates that university students who have a stronger faith in God tend to experience a greater sense of meaning in life and more hope about achieving their goals. The combination of this sense of meaning in life and hope to achieve goals appears to strengthen their resilience to difficult challenges, thereby reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress."<sup>4</sup>

Neal Krause, Ph.D., professor emeritus at the University of Michigan School of Public Health has focused on how older adults cope with the stressful events that arise in their lives. Throughout these studies, he was struck by how many participants relied on their faith during difficult times.

"Individuals who are more grateful to God will rate their health in a more favorable manner and experience fewer symptoms of depression."<sup>5</sup>

This, then, brings us to the third consideration:

Where can Unitarian Universalists find a unifying "creed" or belief that is a solid "rock" to hold onto during stressful times and the challenges and provide them spiritual guidance for simply day to day living?

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth I. Pargament (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford. ISBN 978-1-57230-664-6

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Plante, *Faith and Health: Psychological Perspectives*, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Faith in God as a protective factor against mental illness among university students within Australia. Shereen Metry, Esben Strodl & Amina Sadia, 30 Oct 2024

<sup>4</sup> S. Metry, E. Strodl, & A. Sadia, *The Journal of Spirituality*, 30 October 2024

<sup>5</sup> N. Krause *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 10 June 2014

In answering this question, there is an important difference between ‘**creed**’ and ‘**credo**’. This is because a creed is given to you by a religious authority other than yourself. It’s a doctrine that defines what, how and usually where you must conduct your spirituality. Whereas a credo can be considered our own personal approach to how we view the world and give meaning to our everyday lives. It is through personal credos that Unitarian Universalists find solace and ultimately a common, focused respect for life’s diversity, and our part in a much larger unfathomable universe.

*A note—The Catholic mass call the section I chanted to you “The Credo”, but it really is the Nicene Creed put into liturgical music*

Unitarian Universalism has roots in Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism. Like Buddhism, each person seeks their own approach toward their guiding principles. Like Hinduism, all faiths are welcome to participate in its religion, and like Taoism, UU’s strongly connect ourselves to the natural environment. But unlike Buddhism we do not follow a specified “Eightfold Path to Enlightenment”, and unlike Hindus we are not governed by multiple gods, and unlike Taoism, we do not consider an ultimate fulfillment as “THE WAY” or necessarily embrace the complementary forces of Yin and Yang.

We are eclectic and, because we celebrate diversity in our own spiritual quest, we are perhaps less attractive to the natural human instinct desiring leadership and guidance or “pathway” to achieve our standards of morality. There is the joke about UU’s: “Unitarian Universalism is where you go to get your answers questioned.” In actuality, this can be quite off-putting to those seeking a concrete, specific way of faith...which is how all the major world’s religions are formed.

But for those of you who have chosen Unitarian Universalism, it is like a breath of fresh air to not have a single, well-defined set of rules, a holy book, a figure representing our beliefs, or a THE method for worship. We are united by this freedom of worship, by opening our doors to the diversity of human needs, and by the ‘credo’ within each one of us. We are strengthened by our own personal spirituality that helps us cope and which is often much more meaningful to us than an outside religious doctrine as the given way to cope with life’s many challenges.

Researcher psychologist Neal Krause states:

“Religious [such as creed oriented] and spiritual [such as credo oriented] coping are distinct yet overlapping categories, where religious [Creedal] coping involves structured, institutional beliefs and practices, while spiritual [Credo] coping often pertains to more personal and non-institutional approaches to finding meaning and solace.”<sup>6</sup>

Brenda Jackson and C.S. Bergeman from the Department of Psychology, University of Notre Dame explain:

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<sup>6</sup> Koenig, H. G. (2012). The handbook of religion and health. Oxford University Press

“The coping function of faith is more closely affiliated with an individual's degree of ‘Spirituality’ than his or her level of ‘Religiosity’; religious and spiritual coping [are] apparently less tied to religious behaviors and more contingent on [our] subjective [i.e. personal] beliefs and experiences concerning the transcendent.<sup>7</sup>

It is these personal beliefs that make Unitarians Universalism so strong and resilient to its participants. Our personal credos are what UUism is all about. It recognizes the amazing diversity and worthiness of all faiths, and it places our existence within an endless complexity of creation. In essence, we are united by each of our own personal conceptions of what is meaningful to us.

Yes, we have the Seven Principles, and we have covenants that bind UU congregations and individuals together in a community. But above all it is the affirmation of each person's individual spiritual quest that is a “rock” upon which we can depend and which is our guide in challenging times.

This may seem too individualistic, with UU members all going their separate ways. But the community of fellowship we have as a congregation is vitally important in providing social support to each one of us and assisting in our personal quests for spirituality. This is why we affirm our fellowship in saying:

“...May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected in mystery and in miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.”

In closing I will refer back to the question given to Alpie:

“What’s it all about, Alpie?... What’s it *all* about when you sort it out, Alfie?...”

Is there a creed we should adhere to that tells us the answer to this profound question or is there a scientific solution that, if only studied enough, will finally give an answer. For we UU’s who DO strongly believe in science and its objective, non-mystical approach toward analyzing the world we live in, I think it’s important to recognize how science has shown us that we are part of something much greater than ourselves, and how the diversity of our own spiritual quests are in fact united by a greater transcendent belief that is, indeed, a bedrock for us in facing the many challenges of our lives.

Albert Einstein, in his career of physics and his revolutionary discoveries of the universe, arrived at a view of existence that is, perhaps, the very essence of what we might call our “creed”— When standing in a field at night filled with stars and the Milky Way arching overhead, the damp smell of dew, and perhaps the hoot of a Barred Owl, you too may arrive at the wonder above and around you as did Einstein --

“... [There is a] grandeur of reason incarnate in existence, ...which, in its profoundest depths, is inaccessible to man. This attitude...appears to me to be religious, in the highest sense of the word.”

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<sup>7</sup> Brenda R. Jackson and C. S. Bergeman, Department of Psychology, University of Notre Dame, 2011

### CLOSING WORDS

This then is my “credo”. Ironically enough, I’ve adapted it, not from myself, but from a ‘Letter to the Editor- ‘Opinion’ ” in the InterTown Record. It is what I use currently to guide my daily conduct and bring a balance to my life that I didn’t quite have before seeing this article. You may have seen this article. Its author is the Baptist minister Dr. Glenn Mollette.

*[Read InterTown Record article]*

*“When it comes to life, there are no guarantees...”*

I do also have a personal credo, however I it is not in words... [show paddling video]

### END OF SERVICE

Sit tibi dies benedictus

*(“May your day be blessed.”)*