

Slouching Towards Creedalism?

I feel a bit like Rip Van Winkle. A fourth generation Congregationalist/UCCer and a preacher's kid to boot, making assumptions and so blithely sleeping (not exactly sleeping, my life energy has been poured out in trying to lead congregations on the Jesus way of compassionate justice, but I *have* been asleep as far as the changing theology of the UCC); now having awakened to more creedal language than I ever remember seeing or hearing.

So I thought it high time for me to get with the program, to find out what's happening and why. And because I like to go to the heart of the matter, here I am in Constantinople (Istanbul) for a four month sabbatical. I have a great view across the Bosphorus to Chalcedon (Kadiköy) and sometimes hop on the ferry to go to a great restaurant there. I've spent time wandering among (and atop!) the ruins in Ephesus and Nicaea, breathing the air, stimulating my imagination.ⁱ I've spent even more time reading books and in conversation with my ever-patient, early church historian husband. I've become well acquainted with the creedal development of the early church which began with the mother of all creeds, the Trinity, and in some ways never got much further.ⁱⁱ

I'm trying to understand the resurgence of creedalism in American mainline denominations in the last 30 years, and to check out my hunch that even my own historically non-creedal denomination is "slouching towards creedalism." Having been relatively and regrettably unobservant about inner-denominational workings on this matter, "asleep" as it were, I had a lot of catching up to do. So I came here to learn and perhaps to add to the theological conversation in the UCC.

First, in the interest of full disclosure, a little about me and my biases, nothing particularly unusual. I am a child of the UCC, the liberal end of it. I was raised to be both very religious, though not explicitly so, and with a low Christology. I have many UCC clergy in my family, including a father, father-in-law, brother, and brother-in-law, plus a daughter entering divinity school in the fall. H.R. Niebuhr was my most influential

theologian while in seminary. He helped me move from a troubled agnosticism to a lively faith, with a theology and ethics grounded in radical monotheism. After seminary, Borg, Crossan, and Wink helped stir the embers of my Jesus love into a bright consuming flame. I have a strongly apophatic mystical sensibility that is fed by a centering prayer practice, albeit inconsistent. I've been a devoted parish minister for the last 18 years and now, half way through my career, I note that while I'm moving closer to Jesus, I seem to be moving further from the creeds. I am grateful for the opportunity afforded me by my congregation and the Louisville Instituteⁱⁱⁱ to take sabbatical time and wrestle with the questions that have been hounding me, such as these:

- *How might the creeds have more meaning for me?*
- *What does it mean to be a non-creedal denomination?*
- *Has there has been a resurgence in trinitarianism (creedalism) in the UCC? Why or why not? If so, is this the only voice?*

In this article I will share my three major sabbatical learnings—about creedalism in the UCC, about the trinity, about how the creeds came to be—and then I will bring them together at the end into an agitation for my denomination.^{iv}

The UCC

No Creed but Christ. No Name But Christian.

We covenant with you, O God, and one with another, and do bind ourselves in your presence to walk together in all your ways, according as you are pleased to reveal yourself to us in your blessed word of truth. (Salem Covenant)

Use of creedal language *is* on the rise in the UCC, and not just in sermons or church mission statements. The creedal adjective “triune” is popping up in surprising places in national UCC writings, in corporate public documents. The 2008 advertisement for the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ said: “The General Minister and President must be someone who is grounded in the faith in the *triune* God

....”(italics mine) As far as I can tell, this is new.^v This language “triune God” was not used in the ads in 1988 or 1998. Just two clicks into the UCC web site one reads, in bold print and with no attribution: “We believe in the Triune God...”^{vi} And there has been a slight but noteworthy change in the brochure, “Who We Are, What We Believe,” in a—presumably—more recent printing. What was “We confess the authority of one God” is now “We confess the authority of one *triune* God.” (italics mine). I wonder if this increase in creedalism, slouching though it may be, got its impetus from a synod vote in 1981. The 13th General Synod “requested that the president of the church, through the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and other communions to explore the joint development of a new statement of faith...as expeditiously as possible and asked that the new statement ‘affirm the triune nature of God’....”^{vii}

What is the reason for this resurgence of creedal language in the UCC? Some might claim that this is a natural evolution for our young denomination, that we are finally (and it’s about time!), rather like the prodigal son, coming to ourselves and clarifying who we really are. Perhaps, but I find a constellation of other reasons to be much more persuasive. The Barthian influence (and to a lesser extent, the influence of Rahner and Moltmann) in mainline seminaries is surely a, if not *the*, major contributing factor. The Confessing Christ movement arose, at least in part, in reaction to the *New Century Hymnal* which used inclusive language.^{viii} Our ecumenical work, key to our identity as a uniting church, sometimes exerted pressure on us to accent a creedal identity; our denominational partners needed more theological definition than we were easily able to give.^{ix} The influx of new members^x some of whom, often on account of our liberal social beliefs, have an unconscious assumption that there *is* a normative Christian theology, and they can’t help but “resist the loose ends.”^{xi} These four factors, and surely more, have led to the drift towards creedalism in the UCC.

This is not to say that trinitarianism is foreign to the UCC. Far from it! On the web site (www.ucc.org/beliefs) are listed many creeds that we claim as our own and that include explicit trinitarian language. At least three of our four founding denominations are

imbued with, if not fully grounded in, the creedal language of Nicaea. (Reformed had the strongest creedal position, Christian the weakest.)

But one can also find explicitly non creedal, and even non-trinitarian, theology in our history. (Go to the web site again and look for these statements that we also claim as our own: The Salem covenant, Principles Christian Church, Statement of Faith, UCC.) Indeed, within all of the traditions- Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed –one can find different schools of thought about creedal authority. For example, the radical branch of the reformation that influenced part of the puritan tradition bypassed the creeds and returned to an earlier pre-Nicene view of Christ. “They proclaimed a strictly monotheistic idea of God and clearly subordinated the person of Christ. They rejected the philosophical terminology of the creeds and maintained that the concept of the Trinity as found in them was not biblical.”^{xii} And the Christian movement, sometimes explicitly unitarian,^{xiii} desired union with all who consider themselves Christian regardless of where they were on the creedal continuum: “Let all Christians consider themselves members one of another: because in the estimation of scripture they are indeed.”^{xiv}

How was it that in the 1950s our parent denominations, the Congregational Christian and the Evangelical Reformed, coming from so many different backgrounds, including those who found the creeds meaningful and those who found them problematic, came to desire holy union? Let’s not forget how remarkable this mixed marriage was (and is!) Not Flower Children but children of the Life and Work Movement of the first half of the century, the founders of our denomination believed that they could offer a sign of hope to a world torn asunder by coming together, despite difference, that is, by becoming one. And they wanted to combine their considerable energies to prosper the work of the kingdom of God. And they trusted, oh how they trusted!, that what they had in common was enough. Yea, more than enough!-- the desire to follow Jesus. “No Creed but Christ. No name but Christian”. “In essentials unity. In non essentials diversity. In all things, charity” “Doctrine Divides: Service unites”.^{xv} The slogans then were every bit as profound and catchy as today’s “God is still speaking.” First the two denominations

created the “Basis of Union”. But during those pre marriage counseling sessions, when they were hammering this thing out, surely they must have wondered whether this marriage was possible and whether it would have integrity. I can hear the conversation....“We have so many different interpretations of belief even with ideas as central as the Trinity.”^{xvi} But their deep faith and enthusiasm won the day. “Yes, we must!” “And we can!” “As long as we all claim that Jesus is the sole head of the church.”^{xvii} And so they were married. And their vows? a statement of faith unlike any. It is not trinitarian.^{xviii} It is like our scripture: It is the language of activity not the language of metaphysics. It is beautiful.

So much of the prevailing discussion about our theological identity echoes the concerns of the founders. And there are still those who, like the children of the Life and Work Movement, believe that our clear and strong identity as a denomination is found in our mission, our mission to work for the kingdom of God in and through the inexhaustible power of Jesus Christ.^{xix} And this is enough. It is more than enough.

Trinity

Trinity as a plant.

Father as deep root.

Son as shoot that breaks into world.

Spirit as that which spreads beauty and fragrance. Tertullian

For Christians, the Trinity is the primary symbol of a community that holds together by containing diversity within itself. Kathleen Norris.

They drew a circle that shut me out

Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But love and I had the wit to win

We drew a circle that took them in. (Edwin Markham)

I confess. I am surprised. Not only do I better understand why the trinity is so meaningful to so many but it is becoming meaningful to me.

I've resisted this. Trying to live as a radical monotheist (with all too occasional lapses into henotheism), believing in the radical oneness and connectivity of all within Being-Itself -- well!, this way is rich and demanding, enough for a life time. And when I sit for 20 minutes of centering prayer sometimes I feel as though I am resting in the heart of the universe, one with Being-Itself. The thought of three names or threeness or any names is counter effective in centering prayer. Rather I strive to go into the heart's secret room, into "no mind" and just be, leaving all thoughts, all words and numbers behind. This is to say that the concept of God as one has been key to my theology, my ethics, my spirituality.

But I'm beginning to see how the trinitarian concept can be useful and enriching. (And I wonder what else I may be missing! What new theology will come my way and light up the dendroids of my Christian mind in this adventure of ideas?!) For me, it's kind of like art. I never imagined that any style of painting could please me as much as impressionism. Furthermore, abstract expressionism looked forbiddingly abstruse. But I opened my mind and now I appreciate both impressionism and abstract expressionism. Both open my doors of perception and this always good. Maybe you *can* teach an old dog new tricks.

As one who loves all things mystical, I am intrigued by the spiritual possibilities in the trinity. Not unlike a Zen Koan^{xx} or a Jewish Mandala, mystical contemplation of trinity can shift you to another plane of consciousness. "Unknown infinity plus unknown infinity plus unknown infinity equals unknown infinity."^{xxi} And the beauty of this trinitarian mysticism is that it is essentially dynamic, not static. God is not rock: God is a circle of love.

Other good things can happen with trinitarian thinking. When God is conceived of as one transcendent supernatural being, too often a patriarchal, authoritarian based human

community follows. But something opens up when God is imagined as trinity, as essentially social and interdependent. The prevailing myth of original aloneness is thwarted. God is not a king: God is community. And thinking of God as not just community, but as *diverse* community also has implications for the world. It undermines any demonic drive towards homogeneity. Rather, a deeper appreciation for essential diversity is revealed. God is not a white heterosexual male: God is diverse community.^{xxiii} I am only beginning to enter into this new way of thinking but am eager, with open mind now, to explore more trinitarian thought.

There may be some symbols, some language of the faith, that would be better left in the dustbin of history (“total depravity” and “predestination” to name two) but “trinity”, I’ve discovered, is not one of them. I believe, along with the founders of the Re-Imagining Conference and Tillich before them, that there is inexhaustible meaning in the symbols of the faith; and that we should not give up on these potent words, words like “sin” and “salvation” and “trinity”, but rather reclaim them from the privatistic gospel fundamentalists, plumb their depths and teach them to our children. They are the poetry of the faith and they will give us true life.

But I need to be clear. I am speaking here about the “trinity” as symbol, that is, as a useful metaphor for God; **not** as ontological truth. I am not making an assertion about the objective reality of God (this is not within our capacity of humans) but rather a judgment about the usefulness of the trinity as an idea in thinking about God. This is the difference between what is often called the *economic* (suppose God is like....) and the *immanent* (God is.....) understanding of the trinity.

With the resurgence of creedal language in the UCC, I wonder whether those who consider themselves trinitarian are content to keep this identification fuzzy for the sake of peace and unity within the denomination. Seldom do people ask for, or offer, clarity about whether one is referring to an *economic* or an *immanent* understanding of the trinity. Assumptions are made and we leave it at that. But this is a big problem. It may keep a kind of peace but it is disingenuous for the *economic* and the *immanent* are as

different as apples and oranges. And their implications are vastly different. The economic is metaphorical: It leaves the circle open. The immanent is an assertion of metaphysical truth that one is required to believe as divine fact.: It draws a line in the sand. Even those who cherish the trinity as a most important metaphor for God may not make the cut of the immanent trinitarians if the metaphor is deemed insufficiently Christocentric. I recently heard someone say about an well known theologian, “She’s no longer in the faith. She doesn’t believe in Christ as the second person of the Trinity.” To put it overly simplistically, think of the children’s game in which they go to one side of the gym or the other in response to a series of questions. “If you consider yourself trinitarian, go to this side...” “Now, if you consider all God language but feeble human attempts to describe that which is beyond description go to this side”...and many of the Trinitarians, the economic Trinitarians, would surely switch sides, joining the non-trinitarians.

This gap needs to be acknowledged. When the adjective “triune” is added to God in corporate, public documents, ie. job advertisement, web site, and brochure, the immanent/ontological meaning is assumed. It is therefore, in this context, creedal language. (We don’t use other metaphorical language.. ie. we believe in “the ground of all being” (Tillich) or in “the more” (William James) or in “Being-Itself (Niebuhr)) I strongly question whether we, as a non-creedal denomination, should be using the expression “triune God” in our corporate, public denominational documents. (Sermons and local church publications and web sites are, of course, an entirely different thing.) This is not just a matter of semantics. It matters.

Trinitarian language leaves some of us out-- those of us who are radical monotheists... or those of us who resonate with a binatarian Christian theology (process theology is arguably fundamentally binitarian, as was much of the early church theology with its focus on God and Jesus. The spirit was an after thought.)... or those of us who absolutely need to have wisdom, Sophia, included in the Godhead... that is, trinitarian language leaves those, who have construed Christian theology in other ways equally biblical and liturgical, equally coherent and illuminating of experience, out of the

circle.^{xxiii} The language “triune God” leaves out those who grew up praying, not to Jesus, but to the one whom Jesus prayed to. This creedal language is not welcoming of all who consider themselves Christians. It is not welcoming of those who tentatively step into the sanctuary of the still speaking church with an unexplained longing. Kathleen Norris writes: “In working my way back to church (in her case, the Presbyterian church) I found that even when the hymns, scripture texts, and sermons served to welcome me, the Creed that we recited each week often seemed a barrier, reminding me that I was still struggling with the feeling that I did not belong. Of all the elements in a Christian worship service, the Creed, by compressing the wide range of faith and belief into a few words, can feel like a verbal strait jacket.”^{xxiv}

There is another problem with this trinitarian language when employed in an immanent way. It undermines our UCC assertion that we believe there are many paths to God. Whereas HR Niebuhr’s work represented a step forward in inner faith relations (“‘Jesus represents the incarnation of radical faith’ but Christians must not confuse the particularity of their history with the universality of the God revealed by Jesus”^{xxv}); Karl Barth’s work, his “radical christocentrism, which restricts knowledge of God solely to the revelation in Christ”^{xxvi} is a step backward. How can we say that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, that Allah is just another word for God, *and* insist on defining God as Trinity? We can’t. The triune God, immanently understood, is a Christian God, not the God that Jews and Muslims worship. This is not to say that we should hide or downplay Jesus when we are at the table of inner faith relations. On the contrary, Jesus is our unique gift to the world. But I agree with Lewis Ford that an “insistence upon the Triune God is an unnecessary act of theological imperialism.”^{xxvii}

Where does this insistence come from? Sometimes it seems less important how the three-in-one is understood than that there be the three-in-one. Even mystics of the middle ages seemed compelled to use trinitarian language to describe their experience of *oneness* in order to stay within the good graces of the church. Theologian Cobb puts it bluntly: “The only real reason for retaining the doctrine... is that the church once declared that

God is three in one and so that some way of showing how three can be one is required.”^{xxviii}

Creedal Formulation

“It’s my soul we’re talking about” Dioscorus

“What is it that makes you want to do the theology like linear algebra?” Cynthia Bourgeault

Scripture is our Lake Itasca, our source and our sustenance, yet we are not fundamentalists: We know about historical biblical criticism and we buy it. It affects how we use our holy book. Why then, does it sometimes seem like we apply a double standard, that the other major tributary to our theology, which well deserves and requires the same rigorous historical critical approach, gets a free pass? Why is it that the creeds, how they came to be and who decided, squeak by without much scrutiny? If we are going to use the loaded language “apostolic succession”, “apostolic faith” or “apostolic fidelity” and “catholic”, and “true faith” and “tradition”, then we must be willing to pull the curtain away from the wizard, in this case from Irenaeus, the one who coined the term “apostolic succession” and proceeded to work out the first list which became the foundation of all other such lists.^{xxix}

It is ironic that at the same time scholarship about the great variety of christologies in the early churches is increasing (books like Riley’s One Jesus Many Christologies and Frederickson’s From Jesus to Christ) many liberal denominations, as stated before, are becoming resurgently creedal. But it has always been in the character of the UCC to see new, “enlightened” ways of thinking, whether scientific or historical, not as a threat but rather as an invitation to listen more carefully for how God is still speaking. We should embrace historical creedal criticism, and its fresh work on the pre-Nicene church, just as we embrace historical biblical criticism. Of course, this historical creedal criticism is not so new. We have long known that Christian heresy (different schools of thought) proceeded Christian orthodoxy, rather than, as legend would have it, the other way

around. I have in my hands a book I inherited from my father in law (the late UTS New Testament professor, Henry Gustafson) written by J.N.D Kelly and published in 1960. Near the beginning, the author warns the reader not to be surprised by the great diversity of thought in the early church. “Conditions were favorable to the coexistence of a wide variety of opinions even on issues of prime importance. Modern students are sometimes surprised at the diversity of treatment accorded by even the later fathers to such a mystery as the Atonement: and it is a commonplace that certain fathers (Origen is the classic example) who were later adjudged heretics counted for orthodox in their lifetime.”^{xxx}

Many assume, thanks to Irenaeus’ shrewd work, that the creeds are genuine apostolic documents; that is, that they are a clear distillation of the one “true faith”; that is, a precious gift from God passed carefully and deliberately down from one generation of worthy leaders to the next.

Others say that the creeds were formulated through hard fought linguistic and political battles under the eyes of (and thumb off?) the newly converted Christian emperor and his descendents and that much blood was spilled. Indeed, and this is a shattering revelation, there were many more casualties from intra Christian creedal battles in the third fourth and fifth centuries than from the persecution of Christians in the first two centuries. A couple of hundred Christians died as martyrs because they were unwilling to recant their faith. Many thousands died at the hands of other Christians because of different notions about how the son was related to the father.^{xxxi} And we know that this defensive ferocity, this creedal slaughter, didn’t end in the ancient world. As Karen Armstrong notes: “Luther believed that all “heretical” books should be banned and both Calvin and Zwingli were prepared to execute dissidents.”^{xxxii} And how many women lost their positions in the church because they were part of the Re-Imaging Conference in 1993?

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s start closer to the beginning. First, let us keep in mind that there were three major ingredients in this creedal concoction, this syncretistic stew: 1. The Jewish narrative with its monotheistic theology 2. Greek

thought- a philosophy that valued highly exact reasoning and the art of rhetoric and did not shy away from making ontological claims. 3. The Roman pantheon of Gods that never stopped multiplying. (Divine sonship was not uncommon. Aeneas, the founder of Rome, was born of the Goddess Venus and a human father. Also, certain emperors were deified after death.)

The beginning: Jesus came into the world and the world was changed forever. His teaching, his healing, his touch, his gaze, just being in his spirit-filled presence somehow changed people. Into their lives he brought hope, consolation, astonishment- the kind they remember feeling as children, joy at being on the earth. Later, when they tried to describe what had happened, some simply stayed quiet, glowing with their secret knowledge, but others grasped for words. Many said: He is the one. Jesus is the messiah. After Jesus was crucified, people continued to sense him. And they realized that his presence could be felt even more when they were together. Communities sprang up. People would keep the Christ presence alive by sharing special words and feelings. When together, they *became* the body of Christ. The hope, the consolation, the astonishment, the joy stayed with them. They shared meals. Songs emerged. So did liturgy. Miracle of miracles, love increased and they poured it out upon the vulnerable, caring for widows, visiting the sick, fulfilling every good work. Others noticed this band of lively, life giving lovers and they wanted in. They were welcomed. All were welcome. But before they were allowed into the mysteries of the faith (the heart of worship) they had to learn more about The Way. They learned about the sermon on the mount, the ten commandments, the Lord's prayer. They learned practices of the faith like fasting and charity. They did not learn doctrine. There came the time when the newcomers were ready to be initiated into this new life. Some communities baptized "in the Father Son and Holy Spirit" and others used the simple words: "in the name of Lord Jesus".^{xxxiii}

These communities were theologically diverse. In general, the Jewish Christian communities tended to believe that Jesus was adopted by (infused with) God at birth, or at baptism, or at the resurrection and the Gentile Christian communities tended to believe that Jesus was a divine figure who assumed human form.^{xxxiv} But they all put

Jesus at the center of their life together. They emphasized practice--communal and individual, spiritual and ethical-- over philosophical speculation. They were *on* the path, not sitting under a tree next to it pondering the nature of the path.

Then everything changed. There arose a need to define Jesus' relation to God. There arose a need to decide how "this high estimate of Jesus as God's son could be reconciled with monotheism".^{xxxv} Was it the churches themselves that needed this definition or did Constantine need it to help unify the empire? Thus began the centuries long "conversation" that would result in the trinity and its consequent dogma the nature of Jesus. Constantine gathered all the Bishops to Nicea, wined and dined them and made it clear that they shouldn't leave until a decision was made. And it happened. The vote was taken and the nature of God was decided by a majority. There is a coexistence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the unity of the God head.

Little did Constantine and his Bishops know, but they had just opened a big can of worms! They thought that they had gathered the best Christian minds, many well trained in Greek metaphysical thought, and that the formula they achieved was both simple and elegant, as well as being true. They thought that they had definitively answered the question about how Jesus was related to God. But instead the questions multiplied and "as they did so they imposed sharper choices of belief to be made at a deeper level of understanding and with more complex consequence in logic".^{xxxvi} "Did Christ exist before his incarnation? Is Christ begotten the equal of God unbegotten? Did Christ collaborate with the Father in the creation?"^{xxxvii} Even the crowds got into the act. Reminiscent of the crowds I hear right now outside my window—Turks riled up over a football game—the crowds of Arian sympathizers got whipped up in a frenzy and marched around the streets into the wee hours of the morning chanting: "*Where* are those who say the Three are One Power?"^{xxxviii} It seemed as though everyone was invested in these creedal battles. But there were many others who stood on the sidelines, shaking their heads in disbelief after the Nicean event. There were dismayed for they did not believe that it was possible to vote on God. They did not believe that the story of God's love could fit into the mold of Greek metaphysics. They preferred the lack of

definition.^{xxxix} And this stream of disbelief and dismay has continued to flow through the centuries, down through the ethical and poetic writings, respectively, of theologians like Edward Hatch^{xi} and Horace Bushnell.^{xii} Surely the founders of our denomination drank deeply from this stream.

Was Constantine baffled? Nicea didn't go the way he thought it would. But he couldn't back out. If anything, the empire got more enmeshed in the church, in its politics and beliefs. The bribes and pressure (cushy job or exile?...) only increased. The empire *needed* uniformity of belief. "Come to this council" emperor says to bishops. "Vote in a way that strengthens the church. You really must..." Those "unanimous" decisions in the later councils? It wasn't just the holy spirit moving the bishops towards one heart and mind. The empire was breathing down their necks.^{xliii} However much wisdom and beauty these early Christian creeds may hold, we can't forget that they were forged in the crucible of empire, at the center of power about as far from the margins as you can get. Pax Romana was in the air. And once the creeds achieved their final form, once the deciders decided, curses on anyone who departed from the decision. "The Fathers of Nicea defined everything beyond any correction. Curses on anyone who departs from what they said! No one adds, no one takes away!"^{xliiii} God is *done* speaking!

So.... whether the creeds are a faithful deposit of the apostolic succession.... or the unconscious theology of the church made conscious through the work of many good minds together, through trial and error....or simply a fine achievement of 4th century theologians, who molded it, by choice, by trial, by discussion, into a single comprehensive, satisfying document...; whether Constantine was a Jesus lover or merely a cunning opportunist who thought a clearly defined Christianity would help unite his empire....or whether Constantine was invested in a particular Christology or just wanted to facilitate a successful council decision....; whether the creeds were a distillation of scripture or a betrayal of scripture...; whether the credal formulations were necessary for the continuation of the church or whether the creeds nearly suffocated the spirit of Jesus; whether the creeds were ultimately a source of unity or of divisiveness...whether, whether, whether?!!!!!!...whether you believe in one of the above

or all of them depending on the day and the book you are reading... **it seems an act of hubris for humans to believe they can define God.**

Did anyone ever want to stand up in the midst of all that impassioned chest thumping and hairsplitting philosophizing and speak the words from scripture-- what God said to Moses when Moses asked God who God was? "I am who I am"^{xliv}

There's so much we don't know about what happened in these early church councils. To the victor goes the chance to tell the story (and the right to eliminate all the variant stories). Consequently, not much of what would have been a voluminous amount of notes taken in the early church councils still exist.^{xlv} Not much but some. Enough. We can be assured that, as Harvey Cox says "the history of Christianity is not just a history of creeds, but it is also a story of equally faithful people who question, alter, and discard creeds."^{xlvi} I find myself increasingly intrigued by those "equally faithful people", those whose dissenting voices actually made it to us. And I wonder at the courage it took to not only swim against the strong tide but to risk invoking the ire of the emperor. In Antioch there were clergy who didn't want to sign something they didn't really understand. (Not all clergy were well schooled in Greek metaphysics.) "We're being asked something and we don't know what it is to say and we can't lie."^{xlvii} And here's one who spoke out alone: "It's my soul we're talking about."^{xlviii}

We do need to be in conversation with our ancestors, long and serious conversation, that engages both our poetic sensibilities and our critical capacities. How else can we make the faith of history our own? We need to listen to the wisdom of the elders just as much as we need to try to hear the hopes of the seventh generation. How impoverished we would be if we didn't know Augustine's thoughts about memory or Bonhoeffer's about evil or Origin's about the nature of Jesus? But must we limit our engagement to the so-called orthodox thought? Must we then cover our ears lest we hear the *other* voices? Shouldn't we broaden our definition of "tradition" to include not only those on the winning side of doctrinal battles but also those from other schools of thought who were also followers of the Jesus way? This would require a reassessment of the potent words

like “apostolic succession” and “catholic” and “true faith”.^{xlix} Must we make the narrative of tradition into a single stream when it is actually more like a tree with many branches? What if, rather than just following the single stream of orthodox thought, we had available to us the entire family tree to climb all over? (The UCC does well in this regard with that marvelously unruly list of creeds. www.ucc.org/beliefs)

Sometimes it can feel, when doing historical theology, a bit like you’ve discovered a great uncle that your family preferred you not know about, that uncle who was cut off^d from the family and dropped from the family lore... but you accidentally discover him in a photo album in the attic and sense that there is some big secret enveloping him... was he communist or transsexual?... but as you look more closely at the picture he begins to look familiar....in fact, you notice that he really looks like you.... Or you look like him. And you want to know more about him, about how you are similar and how you are dissimilar, and you wonder about how many other relatives whom you don’t know about.....

Yes. God is still speaking. In the voices we strain to hear from the 7th generation and from the ancestors in our faith. All of them.

Immodest proposal: An Agitation For the UCC

Alleluia, Bread of Angels,

Thou our earth our food, our stay. (W. Chatterton Dix)

I walk into the mystery of God through the doorway called Jesus” John Shelby Spong

Christianity is not tight but spacious... a symphony and cacophony from which comes the music of love which we most need to hear.” Cynthia Bourgeault

We are at the beginning of an entirely new chapter in the Christian story, what is commonly called Post-Christendom. It is an exciting time for which the UCC, as a non-

creedal church, is particularly well suited. While creedalism is surging-- or perhaps it is sputtering now-- *another* movement is beginning to flow with power. Sometimes called Emergent Christianity, it is not essentially conservative or fundamentalist. Some of our own children, baptized as babies in this liberal denomination, are finding a place in it and helping to shape it. This movement, born in this post Christendom era, also called the post Constantine era, is, in many ways, like the pre-nicene, pre-constantine early church. It is non-creedal (or perhaps it is more accurate to say it is a-creedal or pre-creedal)and it emphasizes practice over belief—communal and personal practices, spiritual and ethical practices; practices that both shape and are shaped by vivid religious consciousness; practices like centering prayer, observing Sabbath, tithing (the modern tithe).

Rather than being embarrassed by our theological diversity^{li} or harboring a latent theological inferiority complex, why don't we see our theological diversity as pleasing to God? One third century writer observed the Christian diversity in her time and reflected: "Consider how by this variety in beliefs the very maker of all is gratified."^{lii} Furthermore, it is a unique and desirable witness in these times, when more and more connections are being made between pre-and post Constantinian Christianity. Harvey Cox writes: "Creeds didn't exist then. They are fading in importance now."^{liii} Who knows? Perhaps we were born for just such a time as this?^{liv} How wonderfully prescient of Shinn who wrote: "We are theologically diverse, at least as diverse as churches of the new Testament..... The writers of the Statement of Faith of the UCC in produced in some ways, a 'pre-Nicene' statement, that is a statement closer to the Bible than to the metaphysics that dominated Greek-Roman thought."^{lv} Is it time for a new slogan? How do we get *this* on a bumper sticker? "The UCC: an authentically AnteNicene Christian church!" As the emergent Christian movement discovers itself in the mother lode of current historical research on pre Nicene Christianity perhaps they will be glad to learn, and surprised to learn, that such a denomination exists.

Martin Copenhaver, concerned about our decreasing numbers while two other liberal denominations are growing, attributes it to our lack of theological clarity. He offers a "modest" proposal, stating what he believes can unite us, in a Prism article *United or*

Untied. “Our unity is in Christ. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We worship and serve the *Triune* God and none other.” (italics mine).^{lvi} The use of the adjective “triune” makes this proposal, though brief, far from modest as already noted.

I offer an admittedly immodest proposal. This is what I think we should do as a denomination:

Let us proclaim our non-creedal Christian identity with all boldness, knowing that these three words *non-creedal Christian* can justifiably belong together, close together. Let us cease all “slouching towards creedalism”.^{lvii} Let us desist from using the adjective “triune” in corporate statements. Let us intentionally include all kinds of God language, poetic and metaphysical, christologically high and low in preaching, in liturgy, in adult education classes.^{lviii}

Let us more sharply define and strengthen our organizations, both as a denomination and as individual churches. Let us not just slouch towards order, let’s run to it. *If* it’s true that Nicea ensured the survival of Christianity at a critical time, it was because of the issuing of canons, not of creeds. It was because, at those councils, they defined church organization not metaphysical beliefs.^{lix} The two, church order and creeds, need not go hand in hand. One of the aforementioned growing denominations is the Unitarian Universalist. They are not, of course, tightening their belief system, but they are tightening up their church order. And they are growing in new members and in the capacity to act boldly.^{lx} The KOG work that our founders dreamed of is getting bogged down by cumbersome organization and lack of clarity and accountability of authority. Our quintessentially modern denomination functions poorly in this postmodern era Clyde Steckel notes in his important book *New Ecclesiology and Polity*.^{lxi} We need to make dramatic ecclesiological changes. There will be losses, deep ones, but the only other alternative is a weakness and irrelevancy unto death.

Let us continue our ecumenical work with gusto- It is after all at the heart of our mission as a denomination-but not by sacrificing our non-creedal identity. We accept our partners

the way they are, and want to get married, but it has to go both ways. We can not become something we are not in order to make them happy. Besides, there are many ways to partner. My congregation does some of its most powerful KOG work in partnership with other religious communities (unfortunately usually not UCC, not yet anyway, too much talk, not enough rigorous organizing). We do not look for purity of belief in our partnerships: We don't agree on all things: We partner with Lutherans and Catholics on health reform and with Unitarians and Reform Jews on equal marriage rights.

Let us strengthen our UCC identity by insisting (yes, I am choosing the word "insist" and not "encourage") that clergy "with standing" attend their annual conference. Clergy are the most constant leaders in the church and annual conference is when we receive our sorely needed, and usually happily received, booster shot of denominationalism.^{lxii} And let's make sure every fresh ordinand receives a gift subscription to Prism in the hope that this will spark ongoing denominational theological engagement, of the midrash kind, not the authoritarian kind. It is not good for active UCC clergy to sleep like Rip Van Winkle.

Let us engage potential UCC ministers in rigorous, substantive theological dialogue without resorting to creedal testing at Ecclesiastical Councils. Let's learn about how the candidates engage with Christian tradition ("tradition" broadly defined, see above) and what streams of thought and which thinkers have most informed their own theology? Who knows what we might hear? (Follow up questions are often a good thing. Ill timed laughter is not.) "I'm a Feminist Barthian with strong liberation theology tendencies." "I'm taken with process theology and so tend towards binitarianism." "I trace my christological lineage back from Schleiermacher to Servetus to Nestorius to Paul of Samosata to Theodotus the Cobbler to Jesus."

Finally, and most importantly, let's get really, as Anne Lamott, says "Jesusy". We don't have anything to lose, no one to appease any more with a palatable religion-lite. After all, we are now in post Christendom. No one is a Christian by accident any more. If they are in church, it's because they are choosing this over a million other things they could

be doing, including drinking a latte and reading the New York Times. They are choosing to follow Jesus. It's true. We are not building churches as fast as we did in the 1950s but thank God we don't have to dilute our message any more. No more dancing at the edges. Let's hurl ourselves into the mosh pit. Constantine is out of the picture: Let's *really* follow the Jesus way now. Let's rediscover the ancient practices. Let us be fortified: Let us eat the body and drink the blood^{lxiii} and then set out on the path together, onto that exciting path into the deep forest of compassionate justice, not alone, but with one another. It's going to take money, time, commitment, and sometimes, when the injustice is so clear and so close, it will take a willingness to put our very bodies in uncomfortable and risky places.... as we go to Guatemala or to the Philippines to be in solidarity with the faithful justice seekers... or stand in front of a very, very angry crowd of neighbors and say what we know they don't want to hear about building workforce housing on our church parking lot.... or sit down and link arms with others obstructing business as usual, in an act of civil disobedience, at the headquarters of UnitedHealth because this corporation gives more money than any other to kill health care reform. If there are going to be casualties, let them be from martyrdom not from creedal battles.

I'm about to leave this city Istanbul. I've fallen in love with it. I'm going to miss the call to prayer five times a day and the awesome views with minarets reaching up to the heavens. I'm going to miss church, Christ Crimean, with its bells and smells where we chant the Nicene creed (with its curious "whited out" passage)^{lxiv} every Sunday before communion. I'm going to miss all the different mosques and churches, all the holy spaces in this city, that have held me as I pray. I'm not going to miss reading about the early church creedal controversies.

My husband and I spent some time with a Muslim calligrapher.^{lxv} We will be bringing home two pieces of his work. One which we will place in a perfect spot in our living room is the Bismillah "Allah most compassionate and beneficent". The other one will go in my office. It is mine. It says "hiche" which means "nothing". God is not this or that. God is nothing. God is everything.

Endnotes

ⁱ The three major branches of the Church (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) recognize seven ecumenical councils all located in what is modern day Turkey: Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), Constantinople III (680), Nicea II (787).

ⁱⁱ With the exception of the last council (which focused primarily on the use of icons) all of the councils wrestled with the trinity or its effects ie. the nature of Christ. It is interesting to note that all other doctrines ie. salvation, atonement, the sacraments, etc. were formulated many centuries later. Trinitarianism with its attendant high Christology therefore *is* creedalism.

ⁱⁱⁱ I received a Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders for my project entitled “Non Creedal In the Cradle of Creedalism: Four Months in Istanbul”.

^{iv} An “agitation” is an important tool in community organizing. After learning a person’s deepest held values from a series of one on ones, you make a judgment, saying boldly and strongly where you think they are veering from their true calling and what they need to do. They are free to accept the judgment or reject it as inaccurate. An agitation is *not* an irritation. Think of the agitation cycle in a washing machine, getting something clean again.

^v The UCC archivist was only able to find ads from 1988 and 1998.

^{vi} It is not located in the section “Beliefs (Faith Testimonies)” but rather at (www.ucc.org/about-us/what-we-believe.html).

^{vii} Roger L. Shinn, “Revisiting Statement of Faith,” *Prism* 21.1 (2007), 10. Shinn adds that “it is worth noting that the Synod’s action, unlike the Basis of Union, specifically gave instructions for a trinitarian statement. That reflects a heightened interest in the doctrine of the Trinity....”

^{viii} Central statements in the Confessing Christ movement include: “Confessing Christ affirms faithfulness to the one Word of the triune God, Jesus Christ, which we are to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death” and “central to the United Church of Christ is its trinitarian faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.” (Leslie Zeigler, “Confessing Christ: Response to Benjamin Griffin,” *Prism* ?, 12.)

^{ix} “The challenge is to show our ecumenical partners that we do have coherent UCC beliefs and a confessional heritage.” (Gabriel Fackre, “What Does the UCC Believe?,” *Prism* 16.2[2001], 79.) “UCC representatives in ecumenical consultation wanted greater clarity. Christians in other denominations even wondered if we were a “church” because (they felt) we lacked theological focus.” (Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Expanding an Ecumenical Vision,” *Prism* 21.1 [2007], 48.)

^x “In the fall 2007 UCC History, Theology, Polity class that I teach at Andover Newton Theological School, only 5 of 34 (all of whom are seeking ordination of some other authorization in the UCC) claimed birth right membership in the post 1957 UCC or one of its founding bodies.”(Elizabeth Nordbeck, “Unfinished Business,” *Prism* 21.2, [2007],17.)

^{xi} Mary Luti writes candidly and cogently about how she wrestled with the value of being non creedal as she moved from Catholicism to the UCC. “Since I tend towards the normative and resist the loose ends...”

I suspect that this tendency “to resist loose ends” is not uncommon to those raised in a creedal church. (“Thinking It Through: What It Means To Be A Non-Creedal Church,” *Prism* 13.1[1998], 44.)

^{xii} Randi Jones Walker, *The Evolution of a UCC Style* (United Church Press, 2005), 56.

^{xiii} unitarian with a small “u” refers to a Christian understanding of God that is nontrinitarian. Unitarian with a big “U”, or Unitarian Universalist, is the name of a denomination with roots in the liberal Christian tradition but that now draws on many religious sources and is usually no longer considered Christian.

^{xiv} Jones Walker, 153. Rice Haggard was one of the founding theologians of the Christian movement.

^{xv} I thought I learned this phrase “Doctrine divides: Service unites” in my seminary days, but have been unable to locate the origin. Maybe I just dreamed it.

^{xvi} Jones Walker, 78. She writes that the Enlightenment and the Pietist movements “shaped in all of these traditions an allowance for many interpretations of traditional formulations of the faith, and allowed individual theological dissent from beliefs as central as the Trinity, when people’s own searching of the Scripture failed to convince them of its central truth.”

^{xvii} Elizabeth Nordbeck, “On Being An Unfinished Church: Reflections on Diversity in the United Church of Christ Today,” *Prism* 16.2 (2001), 58. “The Constitution and Bylaws, through innumerable revisions and a major denominational re-structuring, unwaveringly affirms that Jesus Christ is the sole head of our church....But these statements leave a great deal unsaid. We *have* no definitive UCC statement about the nature of the Trinity, the sacraments, or the atonement.

^{xviii} This is the author’s opinion. Spirit is referred to in the first paragraph as synonymous with God, not as another “person” of God. God is the primary actor. Jesus is lifted up in one paragraph. “Unlike many classic creeds, the Statement of Faith does not follow a trinitarian outline. Rather it focuses upon the deeds of God and the responsibilities of the Christian life....The S.O.F. remains the single most important distillation of theology in the UCC.” (Barbara Brown Zikmund, “A Documentary Trail” *Prism* 1 [1985], 12) Roger L. Shinn writes, circumspectly, in “Revisiting The Statement of Faith” (see above, 10): “When I am asked whether the Statement of Faith is trinitarian, I reply that it is as trinitarian as the New Testament. I accept the judgment of *The Encyclopedia of Religion* that the New Testament “does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity....”

^{xix} R. Paul Olson, “A liberating Mission of Reconciliation” *Prism* 13.1 (1998), 65. “...a preoccupation with correct doctrine risks a corollary interpretation of faith as essentially belief... We are more likely to achieve unity based on a shared commitment to Jesus’ mission of advancing the kingdom of God... those who favor and those who de-emphasize a trinitarian doctrine, however, can be *united in mission and ministry* while remaining diverse in theology and christology.... Those who wish to claim more about Jesus’ origin, divinity, and destiny, or his pre-and post -existence are free to do so, but hopefully, both they and others who wish to claim less could agree to this functional statement....”

^{xx} Barbara Brown Taylor “Three Hands Clapping” *Home By Another Way* (Cowley,1999).

^{xxi} Karen Armstrong, *The Case For God* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 115.

^{xxii} “Whatever else, trinitarian doctrine maintains that an irreducible diversity is necessary for the ultimate unity—or that the ultimate unity is itself communal in nature, in and through the irreducible diversity.” (Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “Introduction” *Trinity in Process* [Continuum, 1997]x.)

^{xxiii} “Many Christians have found they could faithfully develop their Christology and their thoughts of God without any tendency to tritheism.” (Cobb,109)

^{xxiv} Kathleen Norris, “Creeds” *Amazing Grace* (Riverhead Books,1999) 205.

^{xxv} Paul Capetz, *God: A Brief History* (Fortress Press, 2003),147.

^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, 138

^{xxvii} Lewis Ford, “Contingent Trinitarianism,” *Trinity In Process* (Continuum,1997), 54.

^{xxviii} John B. Cobb, Jr. “The Relativization of the Trinity” *Trinity in Process* (Continuum, 1997),6.

^{xxix} Irenaus was concerned that the “true faith” be passed down to future generations. There were so many different Christian beliefs fruiting in the Mediterranean in his time. But how could one determine what was true and what was false? Here’s how. The teaching had to originate with the apostles and be transmitted through the generations only by those who are authorized. “It is necessary that every church, that is, the faithful everywhere, should resort to (agree with) this Church, on a account of its pre-eminent authority, in which the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those who exist every where.” (Irenaus) Somebody had to do it. So, he came up with the succession list. “Where the fourth and fifth names came from, we cannot tell. Such inventive manipulation, if it happened, would be regarded as spiritual and prophetic, rather than dishonest.” (Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*[Eerdmans,1991],59f)

^{xxx} J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Harper and Brothers,1958), 4.

^{xxxi} Ramsay Macmullen claims that there were more than 25,000 deaths in the two and a quarter centuries following Nicea due to creedal controversy. “A great many, but still only a small minority, were clergy, the rest, participants in crowds....The whole matter has been quite ignored.” (Macmullen, *Voting About God* (Yale University Press, 2006),56.

^{xxxii} Armstrong, 174.

^{xxxiii} Hall, 20.

^{xxxiv} Capetz, 29.

^{xxxv} Capetz, 30.

^{xxxvi} Macmullen, 32.

^{xxxvii} Macmullen, 31. “Consider the questions raised by Arius and his succession. These have appeared, seriously argued by someone of influence at some point in time, in my reading of the primary sources: Is Christ’s likeness to the Father the same after incarnation? Is Christ anointed as man or as God? Is Christ begotten as other men, or made? Is God one or two unbegotten beings? Is Christ the Logos? Was Christ created or born?” MacMullen has a list of fifty such questions on pages 30 and 31.

^{xxxviii} Macmullen, 61.

^{xxxix} Kelly, 239.

^{xl} Hall, 240. “A typical example is given by Edwin Hatch, who at the beginning of his Gifford Lectures for 1888 spoke of the contrast between the Nicene Creed and the Sermon on the Mount: ‘...The question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century is a problem which claims investigation.’

^{xli} Horace Bushnell wrote that “religion has a natural and profound alliance with poetry...The teachings of Christ are mere utterances of truth, not augmentations over it. He gives it forth in living symbols, without definition, without proving it, ever, as the logicians speak, well understanding that truth is that which finds us, to use and admirable expression of Coleridge, and thus enters into us.” (Jones Walker, 117.)

^{xlii} MacMullen, 118.

^{xliii} MacMullen, 91.

^{xliv} Armstrong, *ibid.* “When Moses asked God who he was Yahweh in effect replied, ‘Never mind who I am.’ There must be no discussion of God’s nature. Eventually Jews would refuse to pronounce the name of Yahweh, as a tacit admission that any attempt to express the divine reality would be so limiting as to be almost blasphemous.... (39) In Islam, theological speculation that results in formulations of abstruse doctrine is dismissed as *zannah*, self indulgent guesswork about matters that nobody can prove one way another but that makes people quarrelsome and stupidly sectarian....(99) During the tenth century, the Brahmin priests developed the *Brahmodya* competition, which would become a model of authentic religious discourse. The contestants began by going on a retreat in the forest, where they performed spiritual exercises, such as fasting and breath control, that concentrated their minds and induced a different type of consciousness. Then the contest could begin. Its goal was to find a verbal formula to define the Brahman, in the process pushing language as far as it could go, until it finally broke down and people became vividly aware of the ineffable, the other. The challenger asked an enigmatic question, and his opponent had to reply in a way that was apt but equally inscrutable. The winner was the contestant who reduced his opponents to silence—and in that moment of silence, when language revealed its inadequacy, the Brahman was present; it became manifest only in the stunning realization of the impotence of speech.”(13)

^{xlv} We know that the whole process was carefully seen to. “The conciliar proceedings were all taken down verbatim in short hand.” But we also know that much was lost. “It should be remembered that the councils met over controversial business; and it is the rule across time that the record of controversies will serve or not at the pleasure of the winners.” (Macmullen 7,8.)

^{xlvi} Cox, 4.

^{xlvii} Macmullen, 63.

^{xlviii} MacMullen, 91.

^{xlix} I don’t want to seem callow here, somehow suggesting that this is a minor matter. La-dee-da. Though we in the UCC confess an uneasiness about creeds, still the constitution, among other important documents, expresses the great importance of traditional creeds. “It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds...” But still I *am* suggesting that there may be more light and truth to break forth on this matter especially given the plethora of recent scholarship about the varieties of “early Christianities”.

^l In Family Systems Theory “cut off” is always damaging to the entire family system not just to the one cut off. It is always best to work at inclusion and reconciliation. This may mean making discriminating

judgments about behavior but never about the persons themselves. www.thebowencenter.org/pages/theory.html

^{li} Kathleen Norris writes about the diversity that has always been in Christianity. “ Church historians such as Margaret Miles point out the ‘Christianity is, and historically has been, pluralistic in beliefs, creeds, and liturgical and devotional practices in different geographical settings as well as over the 2,000 years of its existence.’ The wonder is that this flexibility and diversity has often been considered more of an embarrassment than celebrated as one of the religion’s strengths.” (“Trinity”, *Amazing Grace* [Riverhead Books, 1999] 289.)

^{lii} MacMullen, 25. “He wishes the Christians of one sect [‘Syrians’] to shape theirs in one way, the non-Christians [‘Greeks’] in another, the Christians [of another sect, ‘Egyptians’] in still a third; and the Syrians themselves, not all in the same way.... No one thinks just like his neighbor, but one man this way, another, that.”

^{liii} Cox, 19.

^{liv} In Esther 4:14, Mordecai challenges the reluctant Esther to recognize how well situated she is and to do what she has the power to do for her people. The UCC came into being as a union “for just such a time as this” in the midst of a world torn apart. Could it be that we came into being “for just such a time as this” again—as a non creedal denomination in this post Constantine Christendom?!

^{lv} Roger L. Shinn, “Doctrinal Freedom and Responsibility in the United Church of Christ”, *Prism* 1 (1985), 51.

^{lvi} Martin B. Copenhaver, “United Or Untied? Searching for Sources of Unity in the United Church of Christ” *Prism* (), 18.

^{lvii} The origin of this statement is from the poet W.B. Yeats via Clyde Steckel who uses the expression “slouching towards order”.

^{lviii} As Team Lead Minister in a 700 member church I am very open to clergy colleagues (Associates, Lily Residents, Interims) whose theology is more creedal than mine. I believe the diversity is good for the church. In new member classes we are explicit about these differences, suggesting that members will hear different theologies from the same pulpit and encouraging them to ask questions and venture their own opinions.

^{lix} For example at Nicea it was decided that the ordination of a bishop required the presence of at least three provisional Bishops. The Nicene Council issued twenty canons (rules) dealing with church order. For more information about the Council’s canonical decisions see www.pbcc.org/dc/creeds/councils.html.

^{lx} Many Unitarian Universalist churches as well as some churches in the United Church of Christ like Mayflower Community Congregational, UCC in Minneapolis are choosing a structure that is, it is hoped, more fitting to these post modern times. It is the Policy Governance model, derived from Carver’s work with non profits but adapted for church use. (www.unityconsulting.org) Mayflower hopes that this structure will allow our congregation’s justice work to flow more freely and powerfully.

^{lxi} Clyde J. Steckel, *New Ecclesiology and Polity: The United Church of Christ* (Pilgrim Press, 2009).

^{lxii} Why is it that there are so many UCC clergy “with standing” who do not regularly attend the Minnesota Annual Conference?

^{lxiii} Churches are renewing their communion liturgies. See Philip Newell's wonderful communion service. www.jphilipnewell.com No longer is communion Sunday the Sunday to sleep in. I love the liturgy of my church in Istanbul "...we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ...." I suspect though, that the poetry is too "high church Anglican" to transport it back to my home church.

⁶⁴In the *Services and Prayers for the Church of England* at our church in Istanbul there is one "whited out" phrase. It is the words "and the son" in the Nicene prayer after "who proceedeth from the Father..". This is curious given that our church is Anglican not Eastern Orthodox. This phrase, is in large part, the reason for the 1000 year chasm between the East and the West. Louis De Berniere's novel *Birds Without Wings* (Vintage, 2004, 413) includes a dialogue about this schism. Kristoforos (the orthodox priest in the village) explained, "They split away from the true Church. It was the worst crime against God.... Worse than murder. It was like a murder of the faith." The priest drew himself up to his full height, and inhaled portentously: "They put "and from the Son" into the Nicene Creed."

^{lxv} It is a holy vocation to be a calligrapher, much like an icon writer. Because his English is limited and our Turkish is even more limited, mostly we just sit in silence watching him write.