

# CREDO

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THE CHALLENGE TO PUT DOWN IN WRITING THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES ON WHICH I LIVE MY LIFE DOESN'T COME ALONG OFTEN. IT TAKES SOME SERIOUS INTROSPECTION, AND ONCE I STARTED I REALIZED I WAS GOING TO BE THE CHIEF BENEFICIARY OF THIS UNDERTAKING. MY CORE PRINCIPLES ARE SOMETHING I TAKE FOR GRANTED; JUST PART OF WHO I AM, WOVEN INTO MY LIFE STORY, BUT UNDERLYING EACH OF THE DECISIONS I HAVE MADE IN EACH OF THE DAYS OF ALL THE YEARS OF MY LIFE. SO HERE IT GOES: MY BEST UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT SUPPORTS AND GUIDES ME IN DOING THE THINGS I DO, AND JUST BEING WHO I AM.

I NEED TO NOTE, FIRST, THAT I GAVE UP ON THE FAITH-BASED LESSONS OF MY CHILDHOOD AT AN

EARLY AGE. COMMON PHRASES SUCH AS “JESUS LOVES ME”, “THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO” OR “ MY REWARD WILL BE IN HEAVEN” SEEMED UNREAL AND UNSUITED TO THE WORLD I LIVED IN, BY THE TIME I WAS 12 OR 13. FOR ME, THE CHURCH’S MESSAGE WAS USELESS IN COPING WITH TEENAGE ANGST, OR THE IMPENDING CHALLENGES OF ADULTHOOD LOOMING BEFORE ME. I GREW UP IN A METHODIST CHURCH BUT NEVER ACCEPTED THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE ALWAYS SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND THE BIG “UNANSWERABLE” QUESTION: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE? IT WAS MY EVEREST!

IN THE DECADES THAT FOLLOWED THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN MY LIFE WAS NEVER FAR FROM MY CONSCIOUSNESS. WHY AM I HERE? WHAT SHOULD

I DO TO JUSTIFY MY EXISTENCE? I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BUT HOW? AND WHY ARE ALL THESE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE ALWAYS FIGHTING?

EARLY ON, I ADOPTED THE GOLDEN RULE AND THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH AS RELIABLE GUIDELINES FOR LIVING. "FIRST, DO NO HARM" BECAME AN AUTOMATIC MENTAL REFLEX WHEN THERE WERE ISSUES TO BE DEALT WITH, AND REMAINS SO. BUT I MUST CONFESS THAT MY EARLY NEED TO JUSTIFY MY LIFE, TO HELP MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, TO CONTRIBUTE SOMEHOW... WELL, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH GONE. I THINK OF MYSELF NOW AS A FALLEN IDEALIST.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE POGO COMIC STRIP HAD IT RIGHT: "WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY, AND IT IS US." WE ARE NOT SPECIAL BEINGS CREATED TO HOLD DOMINION OVER ALL OTHER CREATURES; WE

ARE MERELY ANIMALS, OF THE GENUS HOMO SAPIENS, AND THAT'S THE GOOD NEWS. THE BAD NEWS IS, WE ARE VERY TALENTED ANIMALS; TOO SMART, AND TOO GREEDY FOR OUR OWN GOOD. WE ARE HARMING OURSELVES, AND OUR PLANET, NEGLIGENT OF THE WORLD OUR DESCENDANTS MUST TRY TO LIVE IN.

I'VE LOST MY FAITH THAT AMERICA, "THE LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD", CAN LEAD THE WORLD TO A MORE HUMANE, SAFER AND MORE PRINCIPLED PLACE.

I'VE LOST MY FAITH THAT PEOPLE ARE ESSENTIALLY GOOD. THEY HAVE A CAPACITY FOR GOODNESS, WHICH MANIFESTS ITSELF IN DIFFERENT WAYS IN DIFFERENT PEOPLE. THOSE WHO HAVE NURTURED THEIR CAPACITY FOR GOODNESS ARE EVERYWHERE, MOST CERTAINLY HERE IN THIS SANCTUARY.

INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF GRACE AND GOODNESS  
ABOUND, EVERY DAY, THROUGHOUT THE WORLD..  
BUT LOOKED AT GLOBALLY, THE EVIDENCE IS  
OVERWHELMING THAT MOST PEOPLE ARE  
PRIMARILY MOTIVATED BY NARROW SELF-  
INTEREST, GREED AND FEAR. I AM ESPECIALLY  
HEARTBROKEN THAT, FOR VAST NUMBERS OF  
PEOPLE, OUR PRIMAL FEAR AND HATRED TOWARD  
THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM OURSELVES  
LEADS WHOLE SOCIETIES TO WANT TO ISOLATE,  
CONTROL, DISEMPOWER, AND EVEN DESTROY  
THOSE WHOSE COLOR, RELIGION, SEXUAL  
ORIENTATION OR EVEN POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC  
SYSTEM DIFFERS FROM THEIR OWN.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT, FOR MOST HUMANS, OUR  
CAPACITY FOR GOODNESS AND LOVE IS LIMITED TO  
OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS – THE ONES WHO ARE  
LIKE US, WHO ARE FAMILIAR, WHO DO NOT

THREATEN US. IN SHORT, I HAVE LOST MY FAITH IN HUMANITY.

SO THIS IS OUR WORLD AS I SEE IT NOW. MY DRIVE TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY IS LITTLE MORE THAN A MEMORY, AND MY REMAINING CORE PRINCIPLES ARE WHAT SUSTAIN ME:

FIRST, WHILE I HAVE GIVEN UP ON HUMAN KIND, I HAVE CERTAINLY NOT GIVEN UP ON LIFE.

LIFE IS THE MIRACLE GIFTED TO US, WHICH WE SHARE WITH ALL OTHER LIVING THINGS. IT IS PRECIOUS TO ME, AND I FEEL OBLIGATED TO LIVE IT TO THE FULL, IN POSITIVE AND ACTIVE WAYS. I LOVE LIFE, AS IF IT WERE A POSITIVE FORCE RUNNING THROUGH ALL LIVING THINGS.

SECOND, I AM GUIDED BY THE GOLDEN RULE AND THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH, EVEN IN THOSE DECISIONS QUICKLY REACHED WITHOUT MUCH

THOUGHT. INTUITION WOULD QUICKLY SIGNAL ME IF I STRAY!

I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT I CAN DO LITTLE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. I WILL NOT TILT AT WINDMILLS, WHERE FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT SEEM CERTAIN. BUT WHAT LITTLE I CAN DO, I WILL. AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, FOR ME, THAT GENERALLY MEANS THINGS LIKE VOTING, AND LEAVING THE SMALLEST ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT POSSIBLE.

FINALLY, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO ME THAT WHEN I COME TO DIE I WILL BE AT PEACE, BLESSED BY ALL THE LOVE I HAVE SHARED AND PROUD OF THE LIFE I HAVE LIVED. THIS LAST IS NO ABSTRACTION; THE NEED TO BE PROUD OF MYSELF AS I COME TO DIE HAS ACTIVELY GUIDED ME THROUGHOUT MY LIFE.

THIS OF COURSE, BRINGS ME FULL CIRCLE. I CAN ONLY BE PROUD OF MYSELF IF I TREAT OTHERS AS I WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED, AND DO NO HARM.

AND THAT IS MY STORY.