

## THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS

A paper presented to the Prairie Group  
9 November 2011, Grafton, Illinois  
Burton D. Carley

*This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"

### Imagining the End

Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure  
of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

Psalm 39:4

There is an old Frank and Ernest cartoon set in the prehistoric past. Dressed as club wielding cave men, they are engaged in serious conversation. Frank confesses, "Yeah, I'm worried all the time too—I wish we'd never invented the future tense!"

It was in grade school during the 1950's that I first imagined a future bereft of humanity. The source of this revelation was the duck and cover drills we periodically engaged in. The alarm sounded and we jumped out of our seats and squatted under our desks, lowering our heads to our knees while crossing our arms over our heads. I always thought the teacher was too cheerful for this exercise. Perhaps she didn't want to frighten us. The truly frightening thing I later realized was how ridiculous it was to pretend that we might be saved from a nuclear blast by covering our heads under a desk.

Imagining the end of civilization by nuclear holocaust was far from fantasy. It was made real by the Cuban missile crises, the Berlin Wall, and the politics of the Cold War. Memorable films like *On the Beach* with Gregory Peck (1959), *Fail Safe* with Henry Fonda (1964), and *Dr. Strangelove* with Peter Sellers (1964), kept fresh the possible imminence of apocalypse.

The Shreveport, LA, congregation I served in the 1970's was located not far from the entrance of Barksdale Air Force Base. In the congregation were several Air Force families. The young service men were mostly pilots and bombardiers for B-52 planes. The planes with nuclear bombs remained constantly fueled and ready to take off in a moment. The crews on alert were housed separately from their families close to their planes. The best man at my wedding worked on a strategic planning team charged with imagining war scenarios and the military options for retaliation. He never suggested that it would be prudent to hold duck and cover practice for the congregation.

The Cold War ended but the new millennium is not lacking in apocalyptic imagination. A case in point is the DVD documentary with the ominous title of *Collapse* (2010). The intense Michael Ruppert, incongruently smoking while describing the human desecration of the environment, plays every bit the role of the Hebrew prophet. He warns of the evils of oil, the banking system, the military-industrial complex, and the

agricultural industry, and how they all are speeding us toward global disaster. There are many books and research papers detailing the degradation of the earth, and how humanity at this rate will not survive to witness in the far future the natural ending of the planet by our dying sun. Ruppert, however, has a conspiracy edge to his apocalyptic predictions. Whether one finds the grand sweep of his vision of the gathering darkness compelling or not, there is a sense that he is just as capable of a meltdown as society.

*Time Magazine* described *Collapse* as “hypnotic and haunting.” It is not a description I would use of my Prairie Group colleagues around the table, as insightful and articulate as you are. And this is what I noticed as I took in Ruppert’s gloomy portrayal of the impending American apocalypse. He displays in abundance what we are in short supply of: the motivating confidence of a true believer and a desperate sense of urgency. After all it was our colleagues in New England who were the critics of the Great Awakening. Later, William James, living at the urban center of 19<sup>th</sup> c Unitarianism, noted (I think with a hint of disapproval) that we are not cut from the twice born cloth.

As I slipped *Collapse* back into its plastic case, now wondering of course how much oil was used in making it, I felt the urge for a contravening tonic. I wanted to snuggle with my *Utne Reader* in bed. I wanted to grab the soothing presence of the Dalai Lama who assures me in *The Art of Happiness in a Troubled World* (2009) that for every violent crime committed in 2004 there were 17,542 acts of altruism. I wanted to immerse myself in Steven Pinker’s new book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, using over 800 pages to argue that civilization is working, and that one of the greatest advances in society over the past several centuries is the remarkable decline in violence. But I could see from his chair the wry and knowing smile of Ruppert. He was whispering something. Ah, yes, I was the perfect example of stage one denial.

John Michael Greer in *Apocalypse Not* (2011) talks about *the apocalypse meme*. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins created the term meme to describe the ideas that replicate in human society the way that genes replicate in a population of living things. Greer traces the apocalypse meme through its many adaptations going back to its origins somewhere between 1500 and 1200 BCE.

Greer offers many examples of how the apocalypse meme is over functioning in the Western imagination. It occurs to me that it has captured the Prairie Group. Be that as it may, its current manifestation takes both religious and secular form. The immensely popular Left Behind series of 16 novels has sold over 65 million copies. The books describe the coming of the Rapture and the following upheaval of the apocalypse featuring a Romanian Antichrist. The secular version focuses on an obscure ancient Mayan calendar date of December 21, 2012 that supposedly predicts the end of the world. A major Hollywood apocalyptic movie was based on this date.

Some memes are beneficial but Greer finds the apocalyptic meme self-defeating. In the Rapture version ecological disasters are signs of the coming tribulation. War is blessed as an inevitable consequence of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The Mayan rendition also offers a fatalistic sense of doom that forsakes concern for the environment.

I can find, however, counterevidence in the apocalyptic mood surrounding the first millennium. Two summers ago while taking a riverboat tour of Southern France, I took a side journey to Cluny located in southern Burgundy. It is a beautiful town that contains the ruins of the Abbey of Cluny. A Duke gave the land for a new monastic

community as the year 1000 approached. In 910 twelve monks of the Benedictine rule took up residence. The Cluny house of prayer was blessed by being under the protection of the Pope, and thus exercised independence without the interference of secular authorities. Another advantage was the quality of the abbots that succeeded one another.

Millennial fever gathered strength as a passage from *Revelation* was interpreted to mean that the thousand-year anniversary of the resurrection signaled the final battle between good and evil. Abbot Odon (927-942) declared, “the world is threatened with its end.” The Cluny monks were not going to wait passively so they set about to reform the quality of their life together in the hope of establishing the abbey as a bulwark of heaven in the coming conflict.

Abbot Odilon (994-1049) continued to establish Cluny as a model monastery. The spiritual quality of life attracted more and more monks. A network of over 800 abbeys and priories eventually was created all over Europe. People traveled to Cluny to experience what the monks were doing. The steady stream of pilgrims created a trade center and attracted patrons. The monastery built beautiful Romanesque structures.

Odilon participated in establishing the “Truce of God” that obliged the powerful to respect the life and property of the peasants, clergy, and the weak. The agreement banned all violence from Wednesday evenings to Monday mornings. This haven in troubled medieval times provided spiritual renewal, peaceful commerce, and a center for culture and the arts—all because the monks of Cluny decided to prepare for the end time by renewing their discipline and life together.

The year 1000 came and went just like the year 2000. There was no Apocalypse. Yet something new was born, a reversed sense of mission. Instead of looking backward to guide the present, people began to look forward to build a bridge to a better future. The new could change the old, and even discard the old if it no longer served a useful purpose. While waiting for the kingdom of God to break in upon history one could also build it. Thus a new sense of hope was given birth. Though in its infant stage we might call it progress, or maybe the beginning of progressive apocalyptic thinking. Cluny was the anchor that preserved and enhanced European culture during a troubled time.

Yet it does not exist today and in that is another lesson. The Abbey lies in ruin, its monks gone for over 200 years. Their end came in the apocalyptic form of the French Revolution.

We can imagine any number of endings, some more probable than others. Even if we can avoid environmental disaster, our race was not meant to survive. A solar flare that radiates the earth, our sun turned nova, a rogue asteroid, the slow turning of the natural geological periods of the earth, that other galaxy on an interception course with our Milky Way, sometime something will end an inhabitable earth. Even if these events seem far away, we know and understand our own transience, our fragility and mortality.

Why should we measure our days? It is to come to know what matters. It is to gain the spiritual quality so often missing in us—humility. It is to recognize and accept that we do not own anything, and that this world and everything in it is on loan. Our congregations, homes, rivers, mountains, towns, cities, the free church, Prairie Group, intimate relationships, and even our bodies are not ours to keep but must be returned at the end. We are only the trustees of everything that is entrusted to our care. This is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of being dangerous—the acknowledgement that we do not truly own anything and that we did not make ourselves out of nothing. Then we

may declare our revolutionary motto: the only significance of things is our relationship to them.

### The Unitarian Universalist Apocalypse

You can observe a lot by watching.

Yogi Berra

One does not need to look anxiously to the future in anticipation of the collapse of culture and environmental disaster to ponder how our congregations will survive. Our traditional role in society has been that of mediator. We stand between the secular world and the religious world translating them to each other. In the process our congregations have become less religious and more secular. Our natural inclination is to take on the role of being reformers within culture rather than countercultural communities. John Cobb asks, “Are the churches so acculturated that the collapse of the culture will mean the collapse of the churches as well?” It is a real question for us.

Another conundrum is that our congregations tend to be more regional than neighborhood based. I have a family that drives one hour each way from their home in Arkansas. I live 24 miles from the church. Less than 10% of the members of the congregation live close enough to walk to church. Without gasoline and cars the church would struggle just to have people show up.

Creating and sustaining healthy congregations that grow stronger in an apocalyptic future is difficult to address. We are having trouble enough sustaining our congregations in the present. That is why we do not need to look anxiously to the future for the collapse that comes with a bang. There is enough to be concerned about right now. As T. S. Eliot reminds us, the end can come just as well with a whimper.

If you observe the American religious scene the mainline Protestant churches have been in numerical decline since the 1960s. While the U.S. population doubled in the past half-century, denominations like the United Methodists declined from 11 million to 7.9 million. The Episcopalians dropped from 3.4 million to 2 million. The periodical *First Things* noted that mainline faiths dwindled from 50 percent of the adult U. S. population to a mere 8 percent, concluding that “the Great Church of America has come to an end.”

The Roman Catholic numbers are obscured because immigrants provide new members. However, the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey indicated that 20 million Americans have abandoned Catholicism. The conservative Evangelical wing that grew in the 80s and 90s now discovers in the new century that across the board growth rates have slowed, stopped, or reversed.

We are in the midst of a deep shift. Three recent books describe this shift and where it is leading. In *The Great Emergence* (2008) Phyllis Tickle advances the theory that the Christian faith holds a “rummage sale” every five hundred years, cleaning house and renewing itself. The Reformation was the last major transformation and a new one is now emerging. Harvey Cox in *The Future of Faith* (2009) offers his own scheme, suggesting that we are leaving the Age of Belief and entering a new time he calls the Age of the Spirit. In *A New Kind of Christianity* (2010) the evangelical Brian D. McLaren advocates a changed church less fixated on doctrines and more ecumenical in spirit. All

three authors see a spiritual awakening that is indifferent to denominational brands, experientially oriented, and resistant to hierarchy.

One might interpret these trends as hopeful for our faith. I believe that we tend to underestimate how Unitarian Universalism is also subject to cultural winds. Indeed, if you look at the numbers it is possible to say that we stand on the brink of our own little apocalypse. We have as many members today as we did at merger in 1961. Paired with the U.S. population growth there has been a significant decline in our numbers by percentage. In the past two years our actual membership has slightly declined.

I reflect on my own experience. In 1974 I was the assistant minister at my dream historical church, First Church of Christ, Unitarian, in Lancaster, MA. Organized in 1653, the building sat on the town green with its stately Bullfinch architecture, Paul Revere silver and Ben Franklin stoves. Its membership was listed around 500 members but on Sunday mornings there were fewer than 100 people at worship in a sanctuary that could seat many more hundreds. The monthly trustee meetings were mostly occupied with the state of the endowment fund. Today its membership is listed as 107.

One year later I headed westward closer to my native Texas and Oklahoma roots to serve a 1950s fellowship seeking its first minister. The Shreveport, LA, All Souls congregation and budget grew over seven years. As I prepared to leave the church had sold part of its property and was ready to build a new church at a new location. My successor completed that transition and the congregation received an award as one of the fastest growing congregations in the UUA. Today its membership is 129.

In 1983 I arrived in Memphis, TN at the Church of the River. This is a late 19<sup>th</sup> congregation with a strong culture and reputation in the city. The church grew and it was one of the few congregations to spin off a new congregation in the past 50 years. That suburban church began with a settled minister with funding from the sponsoring church and the UUA. In 2007 it had 153 members. It is now reports 107 members.

Compared to the mainline decline we proudly declare we are doing better. We forget that we didn't have millions to lose in the first place. What is happening?

When I was in seminary (1970-73) congregations of all stripes in our nation generally inhabited a friendly environment. American culture for good and ill was more homogeneous. The typical image for diversity was "the melting pot." Immigrants blended their culture of origin into the American stew. We talked about a generic civil religion defined by a Jewish, Catholic and Protestant ethos. With only three national television stations the projection of a collective identity could be maintained.

In the new millennium there are hundreds of channels on cable television. You can choose the news according to your political taste. There are non-English channels. American stew is no longer the main course on the menu. People represent a far more diverse collection of ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages. They no longer feel as compelled to blend in to achieve the sense of being "American."

Speaking of stew, have you noticed that cafeterias are an endangered species? We don't go to one place looking for variety. Restaurants have diversified offering specialized menus. We go to particular restaurants that prepare Japanese or Indian or Italian or Chinese or Mexican or Thai food. Starbucks became a household name by tailoring its many coffee drinks to the individual preference of its customers.

American culture has diversified. Culture is more specific to a group. Especially outside of the South, one no longer experiences social pressure to attend church in order

to become part of the normative culture. In fact, the church may be viewed with a neutral or negative attitude. Thus the growing numbers of people who identify themselves as “spiritual, not religious.” Young adults don’t join groups for identification, and are less inclined to hang around in order to learn the secret handshake that signals belonging. All of us enjoy the pleasure of eating at the distinctive restaurant of our choice, and ordering our specialty drink at Starbucks. Individual preference drives choice.

On any given Sunday there are familiar “visitors” in my congregation who split their pew time with another congregation. It is a menu choice. A decision is made based on what they are in the mood for and what is being offered. Glowing feedback might be offered on a worship service or program, but it is like a consumer offering their opinion on a customer survey. The “like” box is clicked with an expectation of gratitude.

The new mother calls and tells me she has narrowed down the choice of a church for the christening of her child to two congregations. She happily informs me that The Church of the River made the cut. There is a pregnant pause. I think I was to pitch the advantages of my congregation as the best choice for her. Instead I said that our service for the newborn was based on a covenant, an expectation that the congregation and family lives in a relationship of mutual love and support, and that was how the child was blessed. I invited her to visit the church, and inquired if she would like to drop in for a conversation and perhaps meet the director of the religious education program. We came in second.

### The Limits of Self-Made Religion

Everybody thinks of changing humanity  
and nobody thinks of changing himself.

Leo Tolstoy

The major shifts in American culture pose challenges to any congregation in general, and specifically to congregations dedicated to the habits of the past. There is the danger of the kind of end that comes with a whimper. What are the particular cultural habits of Unitarian Universalism?

The Alban Institute published *Holy Conversations* (2003) by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann. The authors identify a variety of congregational cultures (pp. 234-239). A culture is the lens through which a congregation understands itself, and its relationship with society. Through stories, symbols, rituals, patterns of thought and worldviews, a map is created that offers guidance for traveling through life.

One culture that is of interest in our own context was discovered through the research of church sociologist Nancy Ammerman. She analyzed data from a diverse group of 23 churches that included Unitarian Universalist. In these congregations half of the members shared an approach to church life that she characterized as “Golden Rule” Christianity.

The spiritual life of a Golden Rule congregant places emphasis on service to those in need and living one’s values every day. Developing a coherent theology produces yawns while developing practices that form a “good life” are imperative. There is little interest in changing another person’s beliefs. The primary goal is to add to the good of the world. Worship is a time to put priorities in order and to receive spiritual nurture.

Since Golden Rule congregants place a high value on diversity and tolerance, there is ambivalence about sharing their own faith. While there is a willingness to welcome new members when they decide to join, there is less enthusiasm for actively pursuing and creating new members.

Another consequence of the Golden Rule approach to congregational life is a “soft” institutional identity and “vague” spiritual yearnings. Pursuing personal spirituality and the good life is broad and diffuse. It doesn’t lend itself to institution building. The church supports the individual on her or his spiritual path. The Golden Rule participant does not understand that a primary responsibility of membership is to serve the mission of the church and sustain a faith tradition. The expectation is that the church and faith tradition exist to serve the individual member in the personal pursuit of the good life. Ammerman believes the greatest challenge to Golden Rule members is to develop a “sustained religious vocabulary.”

Does this sound familiar? The Golden Rule culture will maintain a weak institution with an inarticulate public theology focused on serving the needs of its members. When a congregation’s primary attention is orientated toward self-fulfillment there is the tendency to become a stuck system that study’s itself. Surveys measure personal levels of satisfaction, and clergy evaluated on their capacity to serve a smorgasbord of interests without offending anybody. Pleasing individuals takes priority over serving a larger purpose or mission. Inner focused congregations will find it difficult to command resources to grow stronger in trying times.

Four fears rob us of our corporate spiritual power and public presence. (1) The fear of vulnerability. For a people who preach tolerance and love, who repeatedly assert that we need not think alike to love alike, we can be reactive. We tend to emphasize the freedom of the pulpit and the freedom of the pew while neglecting deep conversations about what it means to be a covenanted people who walk together in the bonds of love. Asking our honest questions and striving to deconstruct the world to arrive at what we may know, we can be a contentious lot, prideful, and critical in spirit. Establishing how we are right can overpower the desire to be in right relationship.

We spend considerable energy in competing claims to wisdom and knowledge, and have not yet fully exorcised that inherited Puritan spirit that casts the world into the inferior and superior; the wrong and the right, the bad and the good. Reinhold Niebuhr was especially fond of charging liberal theology with a much too simplistic ethical dualism. He cautioned that good and evil are bound in a dialectic dance. You cannot have one without the other. They will always be mixed together in human nature and history, and we should not fail to mention congregational life.

Still, we want to get it right and become paralyzed by our own internal divisions over things like the language of reverence and the use of metaphor. Unable to be vulnerable to the spiritual struggle in every heart, and unable to articulate the larger bond of our covenant that gathers us in community beyond protecting individual spiritual preferences, our public message too often narrows down to an invitation to join us because we are not like those other folks who want to tell you what to believe. We forget that an institution is not necessary for self-made religion.

(2) The fear of the sacred. We are still haunted by Calvin’s God. Stuck in that rebellion is as much a dependency as conformity. Abandoning metaphorical language that points to what is ultimate and transcendent to the literal minded, we struggle for

theological literacy and a coherent message that distinguishes us as a religious community. It is difficult to gather our energies to a point that gives urgency. The tendency to de-consecrate everything limits our gospel to the rhetoric of ethics, instrumental values, and Robert's Rules of Order. The minutia of process preoccupies us.

The role of the clergy is reduced to giving information, hopefully in an entertaining and inspiring way, rather than being a mediator between the sacred and the aspirations of the congregation. Prophetic vision gives way to being a manager of congregational life. Lacking a transcendent center of value and power, competing ideologies prevail over modeling a way of life. Accommodating the fragmented interests of individuals and groups in the church weakens the ability to focus on common purpose and discerning what the congregation as a whole is being called to do.

(3) The fear of authority. Traditionally our congregations have been about the important task of institutionalizing religious freedom against the abuse of power by both the state and church. Essential to us are freedom of conscience and the lack of coercion in matters of faith. Sometimes, however, we confuse freedom for religion with freedom from religion. Suspicious of the co-opting influence of institutions, we create structures in our congregations that diminish the capacity for leadership by both clergy and laity.

The free church has made a living by questioning arbitrary authority and resisting authoritarianism. We celebrate that history. Yet that is something different from recognizing what is authoritative for us as a faith community. We must ask what our freedom serves.

The temptation is to enjoy the safety of an isolated community, reinforced by the conviction of our special quality. The temptation is to be self-congratulatory for having the wisdom to escape from bad religion and wrong politics. Thus a congregation may take on the quality of being a club, a kind of idealized spiritual but not religious community maintained for the benefit of its own members. Withdrawn into our own subculture, we sport T-shirts listing famous Unitarians and Universalists while pondering why we are so invisible and misunderstood, and not given the influence we so richly deserve.

(4) The fear of commitment. Personal religion will naturally resist the institution, even the institution dedicated to nurturing and protecting the integrity of the individual spiritual quest. When the only important question to be addressed is whether the institution is enabling the individual pursuit for the good life, a weak institution is the outcome. Common spiritual practice, discernment toward public mission, and the responsibilities of covenantal life fade from attention. Out of fear of being homogenized, there is ambivalence about developing a unified sense of a religious mission that our freedom serves beyond ourselves, and supporting a strong institution to pursue it.

Our four fears represent the limits of self-made religion that weakens our corporate spiritual power and public presence as a church with a saving message during troubled times.

### Converting the Almost Church

Truly at the day of judgment we shall not be examined on what we have read, but what we have done: not how well we have spoken, but how religiously we have lived.

Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

There are two characterizations of our faith in the public square. That we are either people who don't know what they believe, or who can believe anything. We may protest these shallow descriptions but I find it instructive that our public footprint is such that we are not often identified with our religious values or mission. The Alban Institute advises congregations that the hardest group to join is the one that is the least well defined. The enemy of the religious life is vagueness. It is difficult to be dangerous when you are unknown.

Brian McLaren begins *A New Kind of Christianity* with a question. He asks, "What would Christianity look like if we weren't afraid of questions?" Some of us are here because we did. Migrating to the other side of the coin, the question changes. "What would Unitarian Universalism look like if we weren't afraid of answers?"

The problem with institutionalizing religious freedom is that freedom does not really want to be institutionalized. Herein lies our dilemma. So I will suggest anathema. To question is not always the answer. It is especially troublesome for people ambivalent about faith, conflicted about authority, and sometimes outright cultured despisers of religion. We really prefer relatively weak religious institutions. And that doesn't make those institutions strong candidates as agents of transformation in the larger culture.

The problems of American culture—consumerism, greed, and self-absorption—are spiritual problems. It requires changed hearts. To be engaged in that work we need to look into our own hearts. We cannot speak with any kind of authority if our captivity in that culture is sufficiently comfortable. We have to examine how our church culture is inhabited with the mentality of our social class, which may be described as middle-class market individualism.

Another name for a changed heart is conversion. James Luther Adams identified in the last century our challenge. He said in *An Examined Faith: Social Context and Religious Commitment* (Beacon Press, 1991, p. 33):

Let me put it autobiographically and say that in Nazi Germany I soon came to the question, "what is it in my preaching and my political action that would stop this?" ... It is a liberal attitude to say that we keep ourselves informed and read the best papers on these matters, and perhaps join a voluntary association now and then. But to be involved with other people so that it costs and so that one exposes the evils of society...requires something like conversion, something more than an attitude. It requires a sense that there's something wrong and I must be different from the way I have been.

Do Unitarian Universalists sense any urgency to be different? Are we sufficiently self-differentiated as a religious people to contrast our ultimate values against those of contemporary American culture?

In December of 2008 I represented the UUA Board of Trustees at the Seattle Summit on Excellence in Ministry. The participants were asked to identify the key questions confronting the future of our ministry. One area revolved around the question,

“Whose are we?” What or who do we serve, beyond the narrow interests of ourselves? I joined that group. In the beginning of the conversation one colleague spoke about how difficult it is to address this question in our congregations, how groping after the theological language to express what we belong to triggers reactivity. The colleague said, “Unitarian Universalists love diversity, it’s difference we don’t like.” Another colleague added, “We tend to have a spiritual don’t ask, don’t tell, policy.”

We need a conversion so that the clergy may speak with conviction and courage from the most vulnerable parts of their hearts about what we belong to, and what we serve, and what that requires of us as a covenanted people. We need to risk our call to give voice to what we safeguard that is vitally important to offer other people. We need to reclaim how we are a religious people in community.

### The Last Judgment

Don’t wait for the last judgment.  
It takes place every day.

Albert Camus, *The Fall*

Why are we not the most dangerous church in America? I note that we do not promote our congregations as dangerous places. We talk mostly about providing safety, comfort, and attending the needs of the individual. For many congregants the congregation may be important but not central to their lives. The notion of covenant does not weigh too heavily upon the conscience. The church becomes a civic organization committed to doing good works but a compelling mission does not galvanize it. I think it is difficult to risk being dangerous without a feeling of urgency. The liberal attitude as JLA pointed out, does not lend itself to that kind of conviction.

Can we dangerous? Of this I have no doubt—if we ready our hearts for conversion and begin to live with religious purpose not as individuals but as a people freely bonded in covenant. To these things I have given myself.

Still, in my sober moments, I must admit to the possibility of the end of Unitarian Universalism. Not all of its congregations, but its expression as a religious movement engaged with American culture. Turned steadfastly inward, without coherence, and bereft of any transcendent beam, our faith may have lost the capacity for creative evolution.

This would not gladden my heart. I cherish our heritage and those I am privileged to call colleague. I cherish the people of the congregations I have served who gave me their trust, heard foolish sermons wisely, forgave my weaknesses, encouraged my strengths, and took seriously our covenant to walk in the bonds of love and grow our souls so that we might give them away.

Yet if our association experiences a whimpering apocalypse, what I serve will not. I serve the church and especially the free church. And if they also shall pass away, what I serve will not. For ultimately I serve what cannot die and that is the life of the Spirit. This is my testimony of faith.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, James Luther, *An Examined Faith: Social Context and Religious Commitment*, Beacon Press, 1991

Cox, Harvey, *The Future of Faith*, Harper One, 2009

Evans, Christopher H., *Liberalism without Illusions*, Baylor University Press, 2010

Greer, John Michael, *Apocalypse Not*, Viva Editions, 2011

Haught, James A., *Fading Faith: The Rise of the Secular Age*, Gustav Broukal Press, 2010

McLaren, Brian D., *A New of Christianity*, Harper One, 2010

Noble, Kate, producer, *Collapse*, DVD, Collapse Movie, LLC, 2009

Rendle, Gil and Mann, Alice, *Holy Conversations*, The Alban Institute, 2003

Salveque, Jean-Denis, *The Abbey of Cluny*, Centre des monuments nationaux, Monum Editions, du patrimoine, Paris, 2001

Tickle, Phyllis, *The Great Emergence*, Baker Books, 2008