

Story of My Christian Faith and Vocation

Abbreviated Spiritual Autobiography

My story of personal faith follows a very reformed pattern: the struggle to believe I am a child of God, created in the image of God; the recognition of my own sinfulness and the pervasiveness of sin in the world; and my struggle to fully accept and appreciate that Jesus so loved me and this broken world that he was willing to offer himself up as a redeeming sacrifice. Throughout my own faith history I can attest that God has used others, including pastors, mentors, teachers, my wife, friends, colleagues, and my children in powerful ways in the process of my own sanctification. The stories that follow attest to God's grace in my life and I can take no credit and only feel deep gratitude for the gift of faith.

I was born and baptized into the Methodist Church in the mid 1960s by parents who believed in the importance of Christian faith. When I began middle school my family began to attend a Presbyterian church on Bainbridge Island in Washington State. Thanks to the excellent leadership of a youth minister and an associate pastor, my experience in the church provided me with a legacy of faith for which I continue to feel indebted. These leaders created the space within the church where I could ask questions and be honest with my doubts, but I was not left to struggle alone. Instead, these leaders channeled my questions into the scriptures and other good books and encouraged me to attend Whitworth College to further my education.

My educational experience at Whitworth was nothing short of transforming for my faith and my worldview. During my college years I was challenged to confront the reality of my own sinfulness and the brokenness of the world as I learned more about myself and global injustice. I traveled and studied in Central America in three countries in the midst of civil war and I interned with the Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C. lobbying Congress on trade policy toward South Africa during the apartheid era. My encounter with the depravity of humanity and hubris of ideologies on the left and right helped me to see that my view of sin was too limited when it only focused understanding on the individual. Rather, I became confronted with the pervasiveness and totality of human sin and became committed to a Reformed worldview as the only credible intellectual and spiritual response to the brokenness I found. I studied international relations and peace studies and soon learned that my temperament was too moderate to be an activist, and was challenged by faculty mentors to consider an academic career.

In graduate school I studied Comparative Politics and International Relations with Jean Bethke Elshtain in the Political Science Department at Vanderbilt University and found that I was now on my own in the effort to integrate a Reformed worldview into my studies. My outside reading included Calvin's Institutes, the works of Kuyper, the Westminster and Heidelberg Confessions, texts from Augustine, and contemporary works from influential scholars such as Mark Noll, Al Wolters and Nicholas Wolterstorff. I am grateful for these influences during my graduate study and they helped to shape my faith and my own research on civil society and development in Scandinavia and Latin America. The story of my sojourn from Sweden, to the College of William and Mary, to Wheaton College, to Whitworth is too long to tell, but I find it interesting that in each opportunity someone tapped my shoulder and challenged me to consider a new calling. I have been grateful for each of these opportunities and all of these experiences have left a deep and positive mark on me.

Throughout my career my wife, Andrea, and I have been active members and ordained elders of Presbyterian churches including the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We are currently very involved in Colbert Presbyterian Church in Colbert, Washington. I have been a

Sunday school teacher of the Heidelberg and Westminster Catechism, an adult Sunday school teacher, occasional relief preacher, and confidant and friend of our church's pastor. My current work makes it difficult to serve in leadership in the church, but I am very supportive of my wife's leadership role as an elder responsible for youth programs on the church's Session.

At Whitworth University I believe that I have found my long-term home, but nominations for presidential roles now challenge that assumption. I am an alumnus of the institution and have been blessed to be at Whitworth during a time of unprecedented growth and improvement. In 2005 I was nominated to become the academic vice president. I remember feeling quite content in my role as a faculty member, but I also felt a deep obligation to be of service to the institution, my colleagues, our students, and Whitworth's mission. During this process I realized that serving an institution closely aligned with my own sense of mission was more important to me than serving in any particular role. I still feel that way, and have enjoyed seven wonderful years in service of faculty, students, and staff at Whitworth University as its chief academic officer. Over the past several years I have received nominations to pursue other roles at other institutions. My reasons for declining these opportunities has been rooted in the age of my children, my own reluctance to serve institutions not well aligned with my own Reformed worldview, and my belief that I still have contributions to make at Whitworth University. It is also quite possible that in my steadfastness to Whitworth I have been too closed to the calling and work of God in my life. Over the past few months I have had several experiences that have revealed the challenge of finding good leadership in Christian higher education. While they express no enthusiasm for change, my teenage daughters have also expressed an openness to consider making a move. I cannot boldly claim that I should be Calvin College's next president, but I have been surprised that much of what the committee seeks in a president aligns with others' assessment of my gifts, skills, and abilities. I have decided to enter Calvin's search process as an act of faith and submission to God in an attempt to discern His calling. I would have no reservation about joining a Christian Reformed congregation and would embrace Calvin's Form of Subscription for faculty and staff.

Statement of Belief

The substance of my faith in God, belief in Jesus Christ, and experience of the Holy Spirit is best summarized in general accordance with the creedal statements of the Reformed tradition found in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. I believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the authoritative and reliable rule of faith and obedience. The scriptures provide a foundational architecture of the Creator's relationship to the Created order, including God's relationship to humanity. This architecture helps me to understand that humanity is created in the image of God; that the whole Creation, including humanity, is corrupted by sin; and that Jesus Christ died for my sins and the sins of the world as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, triumphed over all evil and redeemed humanity and a sinful Creation.

I believe that those who believe in Jesus are justified by His shed blood and forgiven all their sins. This redemption project continues under the covenant of God's grace thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells and gives life to believers, enables them to understand the Scriptures, empowers them for godly living, equips them for service, and works of justice and witness. Finally, I believe that the one, holy, universal, and global Church is the body of Christ and is composed of the communities of Christ's people. The task of Christ's people in this world is to be God's redeemed community embodying his love by worshipping God with confession, prayer, and praise; by proclaiming the gospel of God's redemptive love through our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth by word and deed; by caring for all of God's creation and actively seeking the good of everyone, especially the poor, the needy and the voiceless.

In my own faith journey, I continue to grow in obedience to the teaching of Jesus, seeking forgiveness where it is needed, and forgiving where I am commanded and convicted. In spite of this aspiration I realize more clearly every year that, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick: Who can understand it?”* Jer. 17:9. I know that I live under the grace of Jesus Christ, and yet I am still aware that I suffer the conditions of the fall. Have I effectively modeled the Christian character and virtue to which I aspire? I realize that I can only comment on this question according to my own self-perception, but in most ways these judgments are better left to those who live and work around me. Those who want to know more about this question should not rely only on my statements here, but they should also seek the opinions of my family, students, colleagues, critics, and friends. Any success that I have had in the development of my character is owed to the redeeming work of Christ in my life.