

Integration of Faith and Practice Paper Part I

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Brief Introduction

I am named Anna Benko and I was born in Chicago, Illinois. I am of a family of four. In my family there is my father, mother, and my sister, Martha. I grew up in a loving and conservative home.

Religious Upbringing and Family's Religiosity

Growing up I had a fairly strict upbringing. The Sabbath was observed very strictly. My sister and I were not allowed to play sports or go swimming on the Sabbath. We were not allowed to be on the computer or the TV at all. My parents believe that God loves us unconditionally, but that we have to respect his Sabbath and be careful what we do. Although It was fairly strict, I always knew that God loved me and that he would take care of me when I was afraid or in danger. I never questioned if there was a God and if he really did love me no matter what.

My grandparents were the same, if not, even more strict with the Sabbath and religion. However, my aunts and uncles were all less strict about these things. It was interesting to see the differences between families and how it affected each one of us. Each family member had a certain investment in their own beliefs. My own family and grandparents were very invested in their beliefs and always made sure to be doing what we were supposed to. My other family members did not seem to care to much about their own beliefs and would be more liberal about it.

I think the most important belief that was held is that God would never abandon us no matter what we do and that He will always love us and we can go to Him for anything. There were no other religious practices besides respecting the Sabbath day and following what the Bible says.

If I had to choose one word to describe my religious upbringing, it would be conservative. If I should expand, I would say it was conservative but positive. I stated how strict my parents were with religion and church. I would say it was conservative for all of that, because sometimes my friends would want to go to the beach or to a movie and I was not allowed to go because of it. Although it was conservative, I still had a positive experience. My parents always made sure to remind me that God would never leave me, which gave me comfort and want to follow all the rules. The way that God was presented to me through my parents made me want to know more. I did not feel like following those rules were a burden, but it came naturally.

The training that I received were bible studies for baptism. Every day I would hear about God through my parents and school. I learned a lot through my whole life about religion and God. At this very moment, there are a few things that I do not still do, but I feel like I need to do more often. Sometimes I do not go to church and I want to make sure to be more strict about that and go every Sabbath. It isn't that I do not want to go, it is that sometimes I feel tired or have things going on and I want to prioritize better.

Life-Shaping Experiences

I think that the main people that have shaped my religious identity are my family and friends. I think they both have shaped my life in a positive way. My parents are the biggest role models I can think of. They have shaped my entire life up until I went off to college and even now. My friends were the second most influence in my life. However, there was a time when there were some people that were trying to be my friend that I should not be friends with. They were bad influences and not necessarily going in the path that I wanted to go. However, I did not let people influence me and I kept strong and clinged to my faith. I have never had anything that I would describe as a conversion experience.

Spiritual Crises and Emergencies

Through my lifetime I can say I never had crisis of faith or belief in my life. There were times where things might have seemed hard, but I never doubted God or stopped believing in Him. I would always take it as something that I need to go through and that I will be okay because God is on my side.

Current Social Environment

The beliefs of my parents are very conservative like I have stated before on this paper. They are very conservative, go to church every Sabbath, and cannot buy anything on Sabbath or watch anything. My relationship with my parents is not affected. I believe the same thing that my parents do.

The beliefs of my friends are quite different. They sometimes do not respect the Sabbath and are more liberal in a sense. My relationship with them is not affected either, but it does limit what I can do or go to when I am with them.

The positive experiences are my parents and my family members. There are a few friends that can be negative to my spiritual self, but I do not let them influence my life. They could get me into situations I should not be in, but I usually think better about it. I do not have any other people in my life that I can think of or that affects me personally.

My faith-based support or services, include my church family and school family. I think that being involved with the church is great and also being active in clubs at school. I am part of the Social Work club and it has me focused on helping others and doing things for God and follow Him. Church also has helped me, because it has given me opportunities like being a part of praise team or even going on mission trips. I would love to be able to go on mission trips later on and use that. I would also love to rejoin a praise team here in Collegedale. It helps me focus

on God and doing his work. It also helps me understand and me more patient with people, which I pray to be more and more each day.

There is one church leader from home that I confide in and his name is Chris Davisson. He had been my mentor growing up and he always believed in me. He has always checked up on me, even though I am far away now. I really appreciate his compassion and willingness to help others no matter what. I want to be that person someday. I love helping people, but I want to have more of a mentality like him.

My worldview and beliefs center around the Bible and that creation is real. I believe that god is the Creator of all life and that the Bible shows us how creation brought the world and how we were made. I believe that the Sabbath is the seventh day and the day of rest. I understand that creation might bring up other questions to people, but this is what I believe in.