

Integration of Faith and Practice Paper

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### **Introduction**

Spirituality is arguably the deepest part of the human soul. Therefore, it is beneficial to reflect on my experience with religion and spirituality in regards to the way it has shaped my worldview. By doing this, I will be better able to regulate my personal bias and integrate edifying aspects into my service as a social worker.

### **Religious Upbringing and Family's Religiosity**

Growing up in my family, spirituality within religion was a central part of my home. Both of my parents were raised in Seventh-day Adventist homes and chose to make the beliefs, practices, and culture that come with this Christian denomination their own. They have been actively involved in their church. They believe Jesus saves them through His death on the cross, intercedes for them in the Heavenly sanctuary, and is literally returning to this earth to take His people to Heaven soon. My parents also believe that the Ten Commandments, including honoring the seventh day as the Sabbath, are still relevant and should be upheld out of love for God. In their eyes, the Bible is God's word and should be followed as the truth. They also believe that Ellen White had a prophetic ministry and read her writings often; however they do not esteem these as highly as the Bible. To their understanding, humans cease to exist when they die until the second coming when Jesus raises them up again and hell is a one time event that does not last forever but destroys sin forever. Keeping the body healthy in order to best serve Jesus is also emphasized. My sister, brother, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all hold the same core beliefs. Growing up, most of my extended family even attended the exact same church.

I consider my family as whole to be heavily invested in the beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Not only have they always been consistently active in the church, but they also seek to apply their religion to other aspects of their lives. My family often talks about spiritual topics, listens to sermons, and gets involved in activities put on by the church. In my opinion, the most important belief that they hold is that human salvation is entirely rests on Jesus and all that we do is just a response out of love for Him. Integrating this paradigm allowed me to view my religion as more of a relationship with Jesus, which made a tremendous difference in my life.

My parents encouraged spirituality to be applied to daily life. Along with going to Sabbath school and church every Saturday morning, we used to have family worship every Friday and Saturday night and as much as we could in the evenings during the week. My parents encouraged my siblings and I to spend time with Jesus on our own in the mornings. When my mom would drive my siblings and I to school, she would play scripture songs, Bible stories, or have us memorize Bible verses together in the car. My parents also took my siblings and me to practice our faith through service and outreach, such as singing in nursing homes and going door to door. We also had Bible study in our home every week. Another way my parents taught me to invest in spiritual things is by teaching me to pay tithes and offering to the church. I found these experiences to be particularly valuable and impactful.

I would use many words to describe my religious upbringing, including, conservative, increasingly permissive, positive, nurturing, and stimulating. I would consider my parents to be more conservative when it comes to the culture that surrounds Adventism. They are more comfortable in churches where hymns are sung instead of

contemporary music. They promote modesty and do not wear jewelry. They do not go to movie theaters. They eat healthfully and abstain from caffeine, alcohol, and drugs. When I was a child, they sought to train me to uphold their values and beliefs. Although they taught me what they believe and why, they allowed me to choose for myself more as I matured. For the most part, if I had different viewpoint, they were willing to discuss it and let me act on what I chose to believe. In this way, they grew more permissive as I grew older. Overall, I did not feel like I was deprived of anything. Although there are things that I have chosen not to do because of my religion, I was taught that this was for my benefit. I believe that everything that Jesus asks me to do is ultimately for my greatest wellbeing. I felt that my parents helped used spirituality to nurture my character development and stimulate me to think in deeper ways and ask questions.

I have received copious amounts of spiritual and religious training throughout my life. My parents provided a great amount of guidance in the home and provided me with spiritual books. I am grateful to have been able to attend Seventh-day Adventists schools from the time I was in kindergarten up until this point. I have gone to and worked at Seventh-day Adventist summer camps. I also graduated from SALT, a school of evangelism that focuses on what Seventh-day Adventists believe and how to most effectively share that through Bible studies. I have embraced the majority of what I have learned from these various opportunities. Although I do not totally agree with everything that my parents believe when it comes to Adventist culture, I hold the same core beliefs as them. I have especially retained the importance of fostering a relationship with Jesus by studying the Bible on my own and by participating in service to others.

### **Life-Shaping Experiences**

Experiences, events, people, and crisis have shaped my spiritual growth and identity all throughout my life. Aside from my family, there have been people who have significantly influenced me. Pastor Henry, my youth pastor, initially introduced me to the concept of surrendering my life to Jesus, which greatly impacted me. When I participated in the SALT program, I got to know one of the mentors named Janelle. She hugely impacted my life by teaching me to study the Bible in such a way that I could understand how God was speaking personally to what was going on in my life. Being involved in service and outreach has played a huge role as well. I find that these opportunities put me in positions where I sense my own insufficiency and feel a greater need for God. Then I was able to see God work in ways that I never would otherwise, which increased my faith. One event that I know affected me greatly is when I broke up with my boyfriend in high school. God used this experience to show me that I need to find my identity and worth in Jesus. At another time, I encountered a crisis that resulted in me leaning on God like I never have had to before. I found God to be a faithful support and closer than ever before through this difficult time.

I believe that Jesus has been winning my heart over to Him gradually throughout my life. When I was a freshman in high school, I accepted spiritual things, but I was not excited about them. A significant turning point for me occurred when I attended a program called “Teen Bible Academy” the following summer. At this camp, I spent time reading *Steps to Christ* out in nature, and God really touched my heart. He showed me through this book how He strongly desires a relationship with me. I began to discover incomparable joy in spending time in His presence.

### **Spiritual Crises and Emergencies**

I cannot recall any periods in my life where I have encountered spiritual or religious crises. However, I have had times where I have questioned and doubted God. I remember one scenario in particular that took place when I was at home after my sophomore year at Southern. As I tried to go to bed each night, I repeatedly struggled with the fear of someone breaking in and hurting me. Although I would pray, I had mounting anxiety surrounding this, which was keeping me from sleeping well at night. Finally, I confronted myself for my lack of faith. I determined that my fear was the result of a lack of trust in God to take care of me. As I told God about my fear and asked Him to increase my faith, I found peace and no longer had trouble sleeping at night. Going through this did change me in the way that I handle my fears. I find my solution in turning to God, acknowledging the source of the fear, and asking Him to increase my trust in Him.

### **Current Social Environment**

The beliefs of the people that surround me in my life currently do impact me. My roommate holds very similar beliefs, which allows her and I to encourage each other and hold each other accountable. I also find that I like to bring new ideas and concerns up with her. Sharing this in common draws us closer together. In contrast, one of my best friends has an entirely different experience with God, the church, and lifestyle choices. She feels that the church is too restrictive and is questioning God. I still love her and spending time with her, yet I feel that our different standards in lifestyle hinder us because we are not interested in participating in the same activities. She openly shares her perspective on God, which causes me to reevaluate and question my own beliefs. I find

this to be beneficial because it inspires me to come to my own conclusions and strengthens my beliefs.

I am also affected by the way that those in my life view my spirituality. Most of my family and friends have given me the feedback that they see me as heavily invested in spirituality and having a strong relationship with God. Since those around me look at spirituality as a positive attribute, it drives me to seek and express even greater spirituality. Although I find this to be encouraging, I believe that in some ways it can be detrimental if I am not careful. Hearing this can make me overconfident and self sufficient instead of humbly dependent on God. I also have to be careful not to express spirituality to impress the people in my life but to truly be connected with Jesus out of love for Him.

I am willing to utilize many supports, services, and activities that will foster spiritual growth. I seek to attend Bible studies, prayer groups, Sabbath school, church, outreaches, and retreats because spirituality is the most meaningful aspect of life. I am more comfortable with these supports when people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church lead them out because they are more likely to hold similar beliefs and add to my understanding of what is true. I still feel the need to be discerning and to critically think about what is being presented. I confide in and respect one member of the Seventh-day Adventist church in particular. I go to her for advice and prayer. I trust this lady because she has more wisdom and experience than me. I am inspired by the way she makes her spirituality a practical part of her life.

### **Belief System and Worldview**

I have a theistic worldview that is greatly shaped by my belief in the existence of God. I believe that God is all-powerful and supremely loving. His character is love. God entirely transcends my ability to comprehend Him. From my earthly perspective, I think that He is male yet also encompasses qualities that society assigns to females, such as gentleness and meekness. Even though God sustains the universe, I believe that He is intimately interested and involved in my life. He speaks to me about what is currently going on in my life through nature and the Bible. Although I am infinitesimal compared to the universe, God still orchestrates and cares about the details of my life. Needless to say, He cares about what is going on the Earth as well. In stark contrast, humans are born imperfect and innately selfish. I believe knowing God deeply and filling my heart with Him gives meaning to my life. As this occurs, I grow to reflect His love more. Knowing God and making Him known is the conduit to discovering the greatest meaning in life.