

Integration of Faith & Practice Paper- Part One

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Part one of the Faith and Integration paper will include the religious history and current religious outlook of myself, Savannah Grignon. The discussion of religious upbringing, life-shaping experiences, spiritual crises, and my current social environment will be included. The paper will conclude on the topic of my current belief system.

Religious Upbringing

Religious Beliefs of Family/ Upbringing

Beliefs of family. My religious upbringing began with the religious beliefs of my family and their devotion to them. My parents, siblings, and most of my extended family all belong to the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) church, however, it was not always that way. My paternal grandfather was raised in the SDA church, but left for a few years when he got married. He rejoined the church when my father was young. Therefore, my father was raised in the SDA church for most of his life. My mother became a part of the SDA church after she met my father. They were both active members of the church when they got married and had my siblings and I. Those in the family who do not belong to the Adventist church adhere to other forms of Christianity. My family who do belong to the SDA church are all members of the same local church and attend weekly. They believe in the doctrines of the Seventh-Day Adventist church and follow them. My family is involved in the church and many individuals hold positions in the church, including elders, deacons/deaconesses, and Sabbath school leaders. I would consider my parents and extended family liberal compared to other members of our church. However, my family is stricter in their beliefs than many families that I know.

Religious upbringing. Because of my close family environment, I grew up in a setting where I saw most of my close family weekly at church and was raised to believe the same things

that they do. The close family environment within the church provided a system of checks and balances that kept my siblings and I in line. My parents, however, provided much of my religious upbringing. For a short period, when I was about eleven, my parents instituted a family worship in the evenings. However, this only occurred intermittently for months over a period of a few years. My parents further encouraged my religious upbringing by sending me to SDA schools, after-school programs, and by making sure I got to Sabbath School on time every week. They modeled the religious practices and beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the home environment.

Religious Training and Current Practices

Religious training. My religious training began at birth. The training consisted of an education from both the family and school environment. From the earliest time I can remember, I was inundated with a myriad of books, toys, and games about Jesus and the Bible both at home and at school. Together, my parents and extended family provided me with a loving and nurturing environment to learn about the God. From first grade to the present day, I have attended Seventh-Day Adventist schools. During my younger years, I enjoyed participating in Vacation Bible School in the summer. Throughout all my school-aged years until high school, I participated in after-school SDA activities, such as Adventurers and Pathfinders. In the fifth grade, I began studying for baptism and was officially a baptized member of the Seventh-Day Adventist church by sixth grade. My parents provided me with religious training at home as well. I can remember my father teaching me prayers and how to pray on my own. Each night, when he tucked me into bed, we would pray together for our family.

Current practices. I have retained most of the habits instilled in me by my parents. I still attend a Seventh-Day Adventist church weekly. However, since I have been away at college, I

have not been involved in the church as much as I was at home. I do not attend Sabbath school while at the university, but go with my family every time I am home. I still believe in the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist church, and practices those beliefs in my personal life.

Life-Shaping Experiences

Religious Influences

Positive. The major, positive religious influences in my life include my family and teachers. My family provided, and continues to provide, a meaningful environment where I am surrounded by not only those who love and support me, but also those who share in my beliefs. My nuclear and extended family provide opportunities for me to engage in spiritual discussions that cause me to think critically about my beliefs and moral system. My teachers were religious influences through their examples and the coursework they provided. This was especially true of my high school teachers. I enjoyed memorizing scriptures in school and am thankful for the lasting memory of them. I also learned to how to develop a personal relationship with God while in school. I had the opportunity to be a spiritual student-leader while in high school through the position of Student Association Pastor and enjoyed the experience of organizing a student-led week of prayer and a vespers program for the school. These experiences positively influenced my personal spirituality.

Negative. Due to my sheltered, religious upbringing, there were no major negative spiritual influences in my life. However, my biggest spiritual distraction was when I went to college. I no longer had the time or environment to be as involved in the church the way that I was while at home. I hope to become more involved in a local church once I graduate.

“Conversion-like” Experiences

I have had no major “conversion-like” experiences. I do not even consider my baptism into the church a conversion experience, even though this experience is often highlight of the conversion stories that I have heard of others. I believe this is due to my life-long upbringing in the church. As a result, I have had to purposefully make the religion my own, not just the religion in which I was raised. When I think back to my spiritual journey, I recognize my sophomore year of high school as the pinnacle of my spiritual life thus far. That was the year that I had the most opportunities to be a spiritual leader in my school. Those experiences, in turn, helped me to develop the most meaningful devotional life that I have ever had. Despite not having a clear conversion experience, I am able to recognize points in my life that have shaped my spiritual journey.

Spiritual Crises

Crises of Faith

The closest experience that I have had to a spiritual crisis was when I came to college. I found that my new environment was more liberal than my home church. I also learned that my home state conference is regarded by many others as a “conservative conference.” This caused me to question many of her moral ideals. There were many things that came into question such as jewelry, the meaning of keeping the Sabbath, and the purpose of going to church among others.

Crises Management

When confronted by these moral crises, I decided not to compromise my current ideals until I had evaluated them more deeply. An example of this includes the time when my peers were playing a friendly game of volleyball on a Sabbath afternoon. I was raised to believe that sports should not be played on Sabbath, so when I was presented with the invitation, I decided

not to join in that week so that I could review my belief on the subject. By the time they asked me to join the next week, I determined that playing with her friends was acceptable. Another example was a time that my new friends wanted to eat out before sundown on a Sabbath afternoon. I, again, was raised to believe that one should not go out to eat on Sabbath. I politely declined that week, and after some thought, determined that I agreed with my upbringing; I was not comfortable eating out on Sabbath.

Personal Changes

The personal changes that occurred in me because of these events were subtle but empowering. It was the first time in my life that I had to evaluate and stand up for my religious morals. Doing so instilled in me the fact that my religion was now my own, not just my upbringing. The changes gave me a sense of confidence that I would be able to stand up for bigger ideals if the time came.

Current Social Environment

Religious Beliefs of Significant Others

All my close friends, including my boyfriend, belong to the Seventh-Day Adventist church. However, they are all more liberal than myself when it comes to how they practice their faith. For example, they are more relaxed when it comes to issues such as Sabbath keeping. My roommate, whom I consider a close friend, says she is “just a Christian” now. Because of their liberal leanings, it is no longer as easy to keep my faith around my close friends as it used to be. After they became more liberal in their religious practices, I found myself questioning my own religious morals more frequently. As a result, the number of times that I had to reevaluate my ideals and stand up for them has increased over the last couple of years.

Others’ Views of Spiritual Self

I am thankful to have been raised in an environment where religious differences were never an issue. Even with members of my extended family who are not Seventh-Day Adventists, religious differences were never highlighted or debated. There was, and continues to be, a mutual understanding between all the family members that there will always be differences among our different religious lifestyles. To my knowledge, religion has never been a matter of contention among my family. Those in my family that I am the closest with belong to the SDA church. My upbringing can be described as supportive because of my close family environment. They support my religious views and seek to be positive influences in my spiritual life. This has affected me in a positive way because I have always received the spiritual support and guidance that I needed throughout life.

Use of Religious Supports

Other than my family, I do not currently use any faith-based supports or services that I am aware of. Additionally, while there are many church leaders that I trust and admire, I do not confide in others about my spirituality, other than my close family. My lack of participation in spiritual support systems is mainly due to the feeling of disconnect from the church that I have experienced since moving away from home to go to college. Although I do not currently utilize many of the available spiritual resources that I have, I would be willing to participate in spiritual support services and relationships if the opportunity came up.

Current Belief System

My current belief system is based on the teachings and beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. I consider myself a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian. Follow the beliefs and practices of the SDA church, however, I am not through with a period of questioning and discovering in my life. I still need to finish deciding for myself which beliefs and practices are

especially important to me. I can recognize how my upbringing, spiritual training, spiritual crises, and environment become life-shaping experiences that develop my religious views and spirituality. I appreciate the knowledge that knowing where I come from has brought me to where I am today, and I look forward to continually discovering my spiritual self in the future.