

Spiritual Autobiography

Michael J. Cuppett

I was baptized in an Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and was raised in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). I have always felt a spiritual life within me. Growing up, I felt spiritual connection during children's ministries and at youth group. I had a connection with other children, could play games, and use my mind and intellect to learn about God. I gained an awareness that God loved me, even if it was dependent on "being good" and doing what I was told.

But my adolescence was marked by disorientation. While growing up in suburban Missouri, I wondered about other people and their experiences. What was it like to be Black or Asian American? What is it like grow up in a rural area, or work from sun up to sun down? Why are people Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist? As I asked about these questions, I quickly discovered that the world is a complicated, multidimensional, "living human web" in the words of Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. But then, humorously, a horrifying realization dawned on me: what if I, too, was a complicated, multidimensional person? As I peeked beyond the churches of my childhood and adolescence, the activity and presence of God in the world was unmistakable. The presence of God was more profound, more strange, more widespread than I had ever imagined, and I was determined to step into it. And yet, painfully, those who made vows at my baptism locked the door behind me. I was suddenly on my own.

And so, one can imagine the ecstasy that coursed through my life when I encountered a spiritual community that adopted me while I sat in this desolate place. UKirk Nashville was led by a queer woman and a gay man, and full of students across social and theological intersections. It was a shocking discovery, which injected inklings of love, joy, and optimism into my soul. I had never considered, let alone understood in my body, that I was deeply loved and cherished. And even more so, that God loved and cherished me. This was the pinnacle of the first spiritual arc in my life. Though the people who baptized me as an infant had either forgotten, neglected, or rejected me and my soul, a strange cadre of lesbians, Presbyterians, and college students were suddenly caring for me as a person. They didn't construct a world of meaning for me, but sat beside me as I feebly started making bricks and stacking them together.

I am in a second spiritual arc of my life. Seminary has contained experiences of faith and connection with God that have run the gamut, from euphoric mountaintops to shallow valleys. I have encountered paradoxes that cannot be resolved no matter how hard I try. I am coming into a relationship with the world around me that is present, embodied, and trusting. Participating in spiritual direction has been a key part of my spiritual epic, where I have gained insight into my own relationship with God, and have repeatedly turned my thoughts and presence to the world of faith. It is my ardent prayer that in the current and coming season, I will enter into a fuller experiences of my spirituality and faith that are contemplative, nurturing, and intimate.

Statement of Personal Faith

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Jesus Christ: I believe in Jesus Christ, who is the living Word of God, both fully human and fully God. In Jesus, the paradoxes of God's covenantal love and grace are revealed: within acts of rejection and betrayal, there is also acceptance and forgiveness; within death, there is also life; within hopelessness, there is reason to hope; and the presence of God is among us, even when God has abandoned us on crosses. Jesus Christ, having been raised from the dead through the power of God, reigns over all and is coming again to renew all things.

The Holy Spirit: In the Spirit of God, we are enlivened to the Word of God and to new life. The Spirit bears witness to our souls: our inner darkness, our inner light, and the whole spectrum of our existence and experiences. The day of Pentecost illuminates the joyful burden of the Spirit: that we are all called to the work of God, and that there is nowhere that we can escape God's claim on our lives. The Spirit bears witness to Jesus Christ and God's mission on earth through the Holy Scriptures, which are inspired and authoritative. The Scriptures, contained in the Old and New Testaments are a gift for all of God's people, and bring liberation, freedom, new life, and hope whenever truly proclaimed.

God the Creator: The Creator, in whose love and light we live, was before and after all time. The Creator cannot be fully defined, described, or conceived. We can only speak of the Creator in metaphor, poetry, music, and veiled language, which the Creator welcomes and invites through a diversity of names, perceptions, and expressions.

The Sacraments: In the Triune God—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer—we discover the mystic, communal, and paradoxical nature of God. We enjoy the mystic, communal, and paradoxical nature of God through the Sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each is a well and feast of meaning. In baptism, we are brought into the death and resurrection of God, and commit ourselves to one another. In the Lord's Supper, we discover Christ drawing his disciples close in the most dire moments of life, and recognize our own need for God and the people of God amidst our helplessness.

Humanity: The image of God cries out from all people, and deserves dignity, love, respect, nurture, and celebration. Through the work of the Spirit, humanity enters into right relationship; mutual support; new life and ways of living; and covenant community. We are healed by one another through the power and interventions of God.

Healing: Healing is both a spiritual gift and a calling of the Church. In Christ's healing ministry, individuals were set free, re-enfranchised, brought back into community, and ultimately reoriented towards the Kingdom of God. Disabled and able-bodied people both participate in the gift and calling of healing, as co-laborers and co-learners in Christ.

Salvation: Salvation is the consummation of God's acts of healing, liberation, and new life that are sealed to us in Christ Jesus. It is both a present and future reality, and both a present and future hope. In the second coming of Christ, at the end of all things, the salvation and gospel of Christ Jesus will be fully realized and enacted.