Personal Reflection

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Personal Reflection

Though hesitant to admit it, I recognize that I have had a large number of negative personal experiences that others will never have that have shaped my worldview. I grew up in a strict, conservative household that assigned others value based on their book smarts and belief in scientific fact. My education consisted of homeschooling and a religious middle and high school, where we were taught the chewed-gum metaphor and that Satan planted dinosaur bones in the earth to trick us into believing that the earth was old. I have been in an abusive relationship, sexually assaulted and harassed, dealt with a slew of mental illnesses and struggled to come to terms with how to rebuild my self-esteem from the ground up. I know what it feels like to be so alone that I questioned if God abandoned me, or if it existed at all. My relatively short life has seen a lot of painful memories that have stretched my opinions about the world, but I found faith and comfort in Jesus and his message.

That being said, attempting to change or challenge my worldview is a difficult task for any person, since I believe that I am a fairly open-minded person. I know what it is like to have questions and to be alienated because of them. I have had my opinions and perceptions be ignored and waved away because I am young, labeled with the rest of my generation. As such, it is difficult for me to consider or even look at other points of view that blatantly disregard basic tenants of human rights in the pursuit of science or religion. Thus, it follows that I would mainly reside within the Postmodernist tent. My readings and interpretations of Jesus’ message showed
me that holding onto religious tradition with a vice-like grip is harmful, but so is abandoning God in favor of naturalistic explanations. As a response to people who are overly dedicated to answers, I found comfort and deep, profound faith in the spiritualism of the Bible, where it is okay to doubt and have questions go unanswered. I do not mind not knowing the how’s and why’s because I recognize that as a human, I am limited in my cognizance of a spiritual deity. I know that there are things that I cannot know, and I am okay with that.

The second camp that I would otherwise fall into is that of theological liberalism. My childhood church only preached about personal fault, that God was angry with his people for their personal sins, and that bad circumstances happened to people because they sinned. The Old Testament was favored over the New Testament, except for Christmas and Easter services. I did not realize until I left that church in middle school just how suffocating the messages were, but the damage had already been done. I still have lasting psychological damage from this kind of preaching, in that my instinctive thought in response to life’s curveballs is that God is angry with me. Regardless, I began my own research into the Biblical texts with the understanding that a benevolent Creator would not hold a giant space magnifying glass over its creations like they are nothing more than ants waiting to be zapped. What spoke the most to me was Jesus’ commands in the New Testament, calling for a societal overhaul that would care for the least of us, those who have been affected the most by life’s turmoil. From this I inferred that if these people truly had been cursed by God for their sinful nature, then Jesus would not have offered a hand to them or loved them as deeply as he did the rest of his flock. As I grew older, this resonated with me: Jesus loved each person he encountered just as much as the person before them and he called his people to love as fully as he did. Displaying that type of love is difficult because the current American society ingrains selfishness in its people, praising exploitation in the pursuit of
financial gain. I believe that if Christians are to truly follow Jesus, they must rebuke corporate
greed and be socially responsible, helping the downtrodden and oppressed.

Thus, the most challenging worldviews for me in this class are those that hold hardline
beliefs similar to those that I experienced in my childhood, namely fundamentalism and
evangelicalism. Fundamentalism, supposedly named for its connection to the booklets *The
Fundamentals* is noted for its highly conservative beliefs and opposition to science and reason,
remaining steadfast in Biblical text as the only source of truth (Olson, *The Westminster
Handbook to Evangelical Theology* 36-37). As someone who would be classified into the
‘liberal’ category, my trouble with this view is obvious. However, I have a special distaste for
fundamentalists, due to having my Bible papers and presentations docked points in middle and
high school for not conforming to my teachers’ conservative beliefs. In sophomore year, I turned
in a thirteen-page paper that advocated for Old Earth Creationism using scientific evidence and
was given an 80 and three pages of handwritten notes in which I was told that not only was I
wrong, but that I should go to God and seek forgiveness. This kind of senseless bias puts a sour
taste in my mouth. Though I know that one person is not representative of the whole, I had
enough similar experiences to be forever turned off to any sort of fundamentalist argument, to
the point that I avoid any sort of direct conversation.

Thankfully, the evangelicals that I have had personal relationships with were never as
overly extreme as the fundamentalists due to their broader perceptions of the faith, but they still
held a kind of elitism that I could not ignore. In an interview with PBS in 2003, author John
Green describes the differences between fundamentalism and evangelicalism as “many
evangelicals…would agree with many of those fundamentals. But the strict separatism, the
special doctrines and the harsh style of fundamentalists often turned out to be unproductive when
it came to…the church and…politics as well” (Green, *The Jesus Factor*). In practice, evangelicals are lax fundamentalists who will reach across the aisle but squeeze the other person’s hand a little too tightly. In my experience, evangelicals have been people who publicly distance themselves from fringe fundamentalists, but in conversation with them, they reveal to still have the gang tattoo on their lower back. The best way I have heard it described it like asking a small child if they ate the cheese puffs when they clearly have orange dust on their hands and mouth, but they say no, they did not. Sure, they say they did not eat said cheese puffs, but the evidence suggests otherwise. The metaphor may be fairly simple for the complexity of the subject, but the point stands: people who criticize others for their faith practices for the purpose of building bridges when they themselves practice faith in the same way is nothing more than dangerous hypocrisy.

I suppose then that through this course, my beliefs have been reaffirmed and strengthened. Despite going into this course knowing that my perceptions are biased, my baseline understanding of most other worldviews has been fairly accurate thus far and it comforts me to know that I have at least one foot to stand on to be able to have healthy discussions with people that hold different worldviews from me. However, I am not sure if any of my beliefs have actually changed. Most of my tenants are broad and rooted in red letter Scripture, summed up in loving God and loving people. I want my actions to reflect those commandments from Jesus and it would be quite difficult for any worldview to counter that in the context of my personal experiences. At the end of the day, I want to be able to say that I am following Jesus. This faith that I have struggled to grasp and come to terms with is years of learning to be okay with knowing only a small piece of the puzzle and accepting my part in this world. Faith would not be
called faith if it were not for the blind trust that we must learn to carry in place of absolute knowing; it is faith that will lead us to the truth, but not necessarily to answers.
Works Cited

Green, John. Interview by Frontline PBS. *The Jesus Factor*, 5 Dec. 2003,