

My Faith Journey

As far as I can remember, I have always believed in God. Therefore, I have no dramatic, compelling, conversion story to share. Rather, my experience has been a slow, steady, maturation of my faith. I hope that this process continues. Although I do not have clear conversion experiences, I can identify three distinct events, or time periods, in my life that have helped me move along my faith journey.

The first event was when I was in high school in Finland in the 1970s. Recall that this was the time when the Soviet Union was still (apparently) powerful and the outcome of the contest for world hegemony was in doubt. Several of my classmates converted to communism. You may know the type, growing long hair and beard (such as would grow on a teenager), wearing olive military-style parkas with Lenin-pins and Karl Marx's "Communist Manifesto" proudly displayed in one of the jacket's pockets. Several others of my classmates had a different conversion; they became "Jesus-freaks" and were not any less shy about evangelizing anyone who would listen (and even those who would not) as the communists. The rest of my class--the group to which I belonged--made equally crude albeit mostly benevolent mockery of both of the former groups. However, it so happened that my closest friends in high school were "Jesus-freaks" (or, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd "Vice-Jesus" of my class) and so I paid attention to what they had to say. That was the first time I seriously started reading the Bible, covering all the Gospels and most of the Epistles, and good portions of the Old Testament, too. That gave me a lot to think about.

The second milestone in my journey was meeting my wife (to be). Ann introduced C. S. Lewis to me, and after reading what she had in her bookshelves I went on to buy every C. S. Lewis book I could find. Luckily, a great many were available as inexpensive paperbacks. I read through 20 or so books in a matter of a half as many weeks, and was deeply impressed by Lewis' style and clarity of thinking and expression. Without fully realizing it yet, this was also my introduction to Christian apologetics.

The third, and at this writing, latest, milestone was after I finished my PhD at Penn State and got my first academic appointment at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. When I arrived at UIUC I knew enough to search for "Christian faculty" on the University website. Sure enough, the Campus Crusade for Christ had a full-time staff member for faculty ministry, Bob Schroer. Bob and I met one day, and he introduced me to a large number of very thoughtful and committed Christian faculty members from all over the campus. Bob and the CCC organized frequent events with invited speakers and subsequent discussions. There were also several groups of Christian faculty who met regularly (weekly!) to read books together and discuss them. It was at this time I started actively looking for and reading books on Christian apologetics and found them very enjoyable indeed. The list is long of authors I have read and whose thinking I admire and respect.

At the present stage of my journey I am still very fascinated by what may be called "reasonable faith". I really love John 1:1-5, where the "Word" means "Logos", which in Greek thought is the divine principle of reason that gives order to the universe and links the human mind to the mind of

God. It is no coincidence that the root of the word "logic" is "Logos". I have applied the same thinking that is the basis of scientific research and that I have been trained on to matters of faith. In science, there are two principal criteria for truth, coherence and correspondence. I have been very impressed by the coherence of Christianity, or the internal consistency of the Bible. Moreover, Christianity corresponds remarkably well to data, that is, to our observable world, its people, and their behaviors. Such coherence and correspondence provide strong evidence for Christianity to be True.

I do not know what the next stage of my faith journey may be. Recently, I have become more open to the mystical aspects of faith, for example, what the "real presence" of Christ at the Eucharist might mean. I am also increasingly troubled by the hostility of the society we live in towards small-o orthodox Christianity and Christians, and find myself wondering if I could myself remain faithful to my Lord if put under certain kinds or levels of pressure. Perhaps I should start reading about the martyrs of faith from St. Stephen to the present day.