

Christian Faith and the Baptist Tradition
John Vassar

As a Christian

I have been blessed beyond measure to be raised in a Christian family and some of my earliest memories were formed by the sights and sounds of First Baptist Church in McKinney, Texas. I made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ at the age of seven and was baptized into that body of believers. That began a journey of faith that has not been a gradual incline, but rather an ongoing and challenging relationship I've sought to work out in fear and trembling.

My broad understanding of the Christian faith is as a narrative. The narrative begins with the story of God's good creation and how it became broken through the introduction and spread of sin, and now is being restored through the sacrifice of God's only son. We who call ourselves believers have an important role to play in the emerging Kingdom of God. As God has revealed himself to us through a narrative, I see my role is to continue to contribute to that story. God has called each of us to engage in creative acts to help build the Kingdom of God through our vocation. A Christian university contributes to this creative activity through demonstrating and teaching what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. Through the teaching of our disciplines, each of us who are educators participate in the recreation and reconciliation of our world.

As a Baptist

My Baptist heritage is an essential part of who I am. Although I've worked at a state institution, I studied at a Baptist university and a Baptist seminary for all of my graduate education and have been a lifelong member of Baptist churches since childhood. Being Baptist, is an important part of my identity.

Bill Shurden has identified four freedoms that I find a helpful heuristic device for discussing Baptist beliefs. Broadly speaking, my views on Baptist identity include these four:

- Bible Freedom is the freedom to read the Bible under the Lordship of Christ rather than through the defined prescribed lens of another.
- Soul Freedom is the view that since each of us are created in the image of God, we bear the freedom to be accountable on our own for our own standing before God.
- Church Freedom considers each local church to be an autonomous, corporate body of individual believers and a part of the body of Christ.
- Religious Freedom is the view that we widely respect the rights of others to worship as they feel led to do so, believing in a free church in a free state.

When I have the opportunity to work with churches on an intentional interim basis, we spend considerable time working through Baptist beliefs and exploring how these freedoms are expressed today.

Sometimes in documents like this, there is a tendency toward a doctrinal summary that looks a bit clinical. I do want to communicate that my overwhelming experience of the Christian faith has been one of gratitude and joy. My family and I have been blessed and it is these core experiences that best characterize my journey of faith.

I would be happy to discuss any of these ideas in greater detail with the committee at an appropriate time.