

Connection, Conviction, and the Mystery of Faith

A Week of Relationship, Reflection, and Reverence



Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

The Work and the Calling

It has been a full week, and a meaningful one. I have always loved presenting, speaking, and engaging in the exchange of ideas. There is something deeply energizing about taking complex material, wrestling with it, refining it, and then offering it in a way that is both clear and compelling. Even the preparation, though it requires hours of disciplined effort, is something I value. Excellence matters. It is not optional. I believe we are called to it, and when something is worth doing, it deserves our full attention and our best work.

This past week took me from Washington, D.C. to Pennsylvania, but what remains with me most is not the travel or even the professional engagement. It is the people. That has always been true for me. I care deeply about my field, and I care deeply about truth. I care about meaningful work that is grounded in integrity. I can be candid, even forceful at times, about where psychology and medicine succeed and where they fall short. But beneath all of that, what ultimately gives the work its meaning is connection. It is the relationships along the way that endure.

When Connection Breaks

That truth has not come without cost. I recently stepped down as Clinical Director at a prominent addiction recovery program, a role I genuinely loved. It was a place where I was able to further develop and articulate the NeuroFaith® model, to write, to teach, and to bring together the integration of neuroscience and faith in a way that felt both grounded and alive. There was purpose there, and there was impact.

But over time, something more fundamental began to erode. The connection weakened. Mutual respect diminished. And without those, even meaningful work becomes unsustainable. Stepping away brought real loss, both financially and professionally, but remaining in an environment where connection and respect had broken down would have cost far more.

Washington, D.C. — A Return to Grounded Relationships

In contrast, this week was a powerful reminder of what healthy, meaningful connection looks like when it is intact. I spent time with my brother, Father John Anderson, whom I simply call Ned. He is an Eastern Orthodox priest and someone who stood by me during a deeply difficult period nearly two decades ago. That kind of presence creates a bond that is not easily explained and not easily broken.

Being with him again, and with his family, was grounding in a way that is difficult to fully capture. His daughter Olivia, now twenty-six, is remarkably gifted, particularly in her artistic expression, but what stands out even more is the depth of her thinking and the contemplative nature of her spirit. She carries both brilliance and hardship, living with Type 1 diabetes and recovering from a serious injury, and yet there is a depth to her that is unmistakable.

His wife, Sabine, brings her own quiet strength, thoughtful, perceptive, and deeply grounded. Our conversations were not surface level. They lingered, and they mattered.

The Weight of Worship

The highlight of that visit, however, was attending the Orthodox liturgical service. What struck me immediately was the absence of spectators. Everyone stood. Everyone participated. The service was not something observed from a distance, but something entered into fully.

There was a weight to it. A reverence. A sense that faith was embodied rather than consumed. It felt ancient, intentional, and deeply rooted in something enduring.

That experience sharpened something I have wrestled with for some time. Coming from an evangelical background, I have seen both the beauty and the limitations within that tradition. At times, faith can take on a transactional quality, almost like a vending machine, where depth is replaced by immediacy and the sacred becomes overly simplified.

What I witnessed in the Orthodox setting stood in contrast to that. It demanded presence. It invited participation. It carried continuity with something much larger than the individual.

Williamsport — Relationships That Continue and Converge

From there, I traveled to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where the relational thread continued, but in a different context.

Dr. Russell Gombosi, who hosted the conference, is someone I have known over time. I spoke at this conference last year, and since then we have had many thoughtful conversations. He was generous enough to write an endorsement for my book on adolescent depression, which itself emerged from that earlier work. Reconnecting with him was not a new introduction, but a continuation of an established relationship built on mutual respect, shared dialogue, and professional alignment. He is a devout Catholic, thoughtful, grounded, and deeply committed in both his medical work and his faith.

Dr. Michelle Cretella represents a different kind of continuity. Although this was the first time we met face to face, our relationship had already been established over several years through virtual conversations, emails, and shared work. We have engaged in overlapping efforts and found alignment on issues that are both clinically significant and culturally contested, particularly around the early affirmation approaches being applied to children. Those shared positions were not formed casually, but through careful thought, clinical experience, and a willingness to hold firm where it matters.

Meeting her in person, then, did not feel like a beginning, but rather the natural extension of an already meaningful professional relationship. She brings clarity and conviction, but what stood out most in person was the depth of her faith. Before our presentations, we spent time in prayer together, and it was not perfunctory. It was intentional, grounded, and deeply anchoring, reflecting a faith that is lived rather than merely stated.

The Tension That Cannot Be Ignored

As I stepped back and reflected on the week, what became increasingly clear is that I am surrounded by individuals I respect deeply, each of whom is anchored in faith, and yet each of whom holds meaningful theological differences.

An Orthodox priest. Devout Catholic physicians. A Protestant pastor, Earl Heverly, who has been profoundly influential in my own spiritual life and who consistently calls people to a deeper and more authentic engagement with faith.

The differences among them are not trivial. They involve foundational questions about original sin, baptism, the role of the saints, and the place of Mary. These are not peripheral distinctions. They matter. They shape how each tradition understands God, humanity, and the path of redemption.

And yet, so do the people.

This is where the tension becomes real. It is no longer an abstract theological exercise. It is personal. I have seen their lives. I have experienced their character. I have witnessed their conviction and the way their faith shapes how they live, how they love, and how they serve others.

There is authenticity there that cannot be easily dismissed.

Final Reflection — Depth, Humility, and Gratitude

As I sit with all of this, what stands out most is not simply the differences, but the depth. The depth of character. The depth of belief. The depth of conviction. Father John, rooted in the ancient rhythms of the Orthodox faith. Dr. Russell Gombosi and Dr. Michelle Cretella, grounded in the richness of the Catholic tradition. Pastor Earl Heverly, calling people into a living, breathing relationship with Christ.

Different traditions. Different expressions. And yet in each of them I have witnessed something unmistakably real. A love for others. A commitment to truth. A faith that is not performative, but lived out in the quiet consistency of their lives, in their service to others, and in the way they carry themselves with integrity.

I am blessed by all of them.

And in that, there is a kind of humility that settles in, not a surrender of conviction, but a recognition that God's work is often deeper and broader than our own frameworks can fully capture. Who am I to reduce what God is doing in their lives to something simplistic, or to dismiss what is clearly bearing fruit in ways that are real and transformative?

If anything has been reinforced for me this week, it is this: depth of relationship matters. Authentic connection matters. And when that connection is rooted in a genuine and lived faith, even when expressed differently, it has the power to shape, to refine, and to bless in ways that transcend easy explanation.

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And perhaps that is part of the journey, not to resolve every difference, but to remain grounded in truth while also recognizing and honoring the depth of faith and character in those we walk alongside. Because in the end, it is not shallow belief that changes lives, but a faith that is lived fully, deeply, and in genuine relationship with others.