Oral History Interview

Conducted by Shannon Smith

Interviewed: Rev. Dr. Scott Hendrix

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**Shannon**: Please tell us your name, date of birth, and where you were born.

Scott: My name is Scott Hendrix. I was born December 26 1942. I was born in Columbia, South Carolina, at Providence Hospital.

**Shannon**: What are some of your earliest and fondest memories?

**Scott**: My parents had a beach house in Myrtle Beach, and it was very close to the water, almost on the water, and every summer my mother and I would go down there for two months. My father came when he could on the weekends. He was a dentist and so he had to work during the week. The streets weren't paved back then. I had a friend down there and played with him; it was just a great, pleasant, nice time. I've gone by the house, and it’s still there.

Another thing I remember is that my mother taught me to read when I was five, maybe four. I started school early. I was five when I started in first grade. Whenever she ran errands downtown in Columbia, she would let me off at the library which back then was on Sumter Street. I would go into the library and read. Sometimes, my father, after he finished work, would go somewhere and buy me a book and bring it home and give it to me, although in my entire life, I never saw my father read a book. It was very strange. But I’m very thankful he did that. I mean, it was just a wonderful thing for him to do and it sticks out in my memory of him.

**Shannon**: Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like for a Lutheran and South Carolina when you were young?

**Scott**: I didn't know anything except that it was it was good. “Lutheran” not being the dominant church in Columbia, there weren't too many of us, and there weren't too few. I lived in Minneapolis for a year. We were overwhelmed by Lutherans! In other places where I’ve lived there have been very few.

And, of course, most of them were in the Dutch Fork around Lexington. That's where all my ancestors are from. The first Hendrix immigrated in the 1790’s. He’s recorded in the census. That was right outside of Lexington, though there was no Lexington then! During my first year in seminary, I went to St Stephen’s every Sunday. Everyone knew who I was, but I hardly knew anyone, because I lived in Columbia. My whole family is buried in the cemetery there. I’ll be buried there, too.

I attended Ebenezer Lutheran Church, and it was enormous. I had better friends at church than I had at school. Every time the doors opened my parents went and dragged me along. I loved the service, even though I didn't understand it. Although my parents belonged to the church when I was born, I was baptized in their apartment. That wasn’t uncommon, at least earlier in the 20th century. My grandmother was born and baptized at a house.

I loved the music and service. It took me a long time to realize what the sermons were about. But going to church was just something you did. I also remember if I couldn’t sit still, my mother would pinch me on the arm and make me sit back down. I remember that well!

In Sunday School we had a very good teacher who with maps taught us the travels of Paul. It was fascinating, even to sixth graders. I was an acolyte and crucifer; these were only boys back then. I remember being confirmed, and I was given a line from the Bible: “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). I was very impressed by that. I was also in Junior Choir.

I remember that women wore hats and we used fans. Ebenezer was a beautiful church, but it was hot! I remember that the four of us guys were eventually allowed to sit in the balcony as long as we behaved ourselves. That was parish life. All church, all the time.

**Shannon**: Did you find that as a young man, when you weren’t in the parish, did you find yourself thinking of theological matters?

**Scott**: No, I don’t remember discussing that among my friends. It was something you took for granted. I didn’t know much about Martin Luther. I didn’t read anything about him until I was in college. We talked about girls sometimes. (chuckles)

**Shannon**: So you went to Dreher High School. Did you have any extra-curricular activities in high school?

**Scott**: Ping pong was a big deal. I had a paper route, and I was on the yearbook committee. I was there only in high-school for three years. There was an experiment with my junior high class at Hand. We all took a test, and when we got to Dreher, they put us in classes according to how we did on the test. We could finish in three years, and my parents had me do that. So I was 16 when I went to college.

I loved math and history and then especially German; my freshman year they started teaching German, because it was right after Sputnik in Russia. We were supposed to learn German so we could be as smart as the Germans! I learned that I liked languages then.

I began college at the Citadel. My father attended there. My mother, who was a teacher, went to summer school at Duke. She wanted me to go to Duke. Instead of telling me where to go, my parents let me decide where I wanted to go. They were smart. After my first semester at the Citadel, I knew I didn’t want to be there. I then transferred to Duke. I was there three and a half years.

The courses at the Citadel were more like high school courses, but the courses at Duke were real college courses! I met my wife Emilee during this time. Luther League members would meet once a year in Newberry, and my friends and I decided to go there to see what the girls were like. That’s when I met her.

I read a lot. I did a senior thesis. I was also in ROTC. That’s when we first started to hear about Vietnam. So my father thought it was a good idea to be in ROTC. After two years in college, I decided to go to seminary.

**Shannon**: When did you enter seminary?

**Scott**: 1963.

**Shannon**: What made you want to study theology?

**Scott**: At Duke, you had to take two semesters of what they called “Bible”. I had a very good professor, and I was blown away. I never studied its history. It was fascinating. I read a biography of Luther in a history class, and it was very interesting.

Shannon: In what year did you and Emilee marry?

**Scott**: 1965.

**Shannon**: What was life like for Emilee?

**Scott**: We married in the summer before my internship and Minneapolis, and right after our wedding, we hopped in the car for Minnesota. It was a great year. We made great friends in Minneapolis. We stay in contact with them. We served at Holy Trinity English Church.

After a year we came back to seminary and lived in a house behind the president. Emilee found a job, and I remained in school. And then I graduated and decided I wanted to study Church History. It was mostly George Anderson who had influence on me.

Another fond memory was that Professor Anderson invited some of us students—I think maybe five or six--to come to his house on Friday afternoons. And we would sit around the dining room table and sometimes we read books, and sometimes we read the *pericopes* for the next Sunday and talk about them.

I studied Latin at Harvard for eight weeks my freshman year, and the guy who taught it recommended I study with a man who was teaching at Harvard who was from Holland. But that man returned to Germany at the University of Tübingen. He had his own institute. His name was Heiko Oberman. So I graduated in 1967 from seminary, and I went to Germany to study there.

The seminary was pretty conservative then. When I first got there the President was Dr. Reinartz. I remember we were going to have a really radical theologian come talk and he said no, you couldn't do that.

Raymond Bost taught me American History, but George taught me everything else.

But the studying in Germany turned out to be top notch. It allowed me to learn German in the right way. Our daughter was born there; we still say it was the best time of our lives, those four years.

George Anderson was made president of the seminary, and they needed a professor for Church History, and so I became a candidate and they chose me. We didn’t want to go back to Columbia, but it was difficult to interview for a job in the United States while living in Germany in 1971. The people who had taught me were mostly there; they were very good to me and treated me like professor on the same level, and that was very nice of them.

Shannon: What theologians were formative for you?

Scott: I wrote a thesis on Augustine at Seminary, and of course I learned about Luther at Seminary. Kierkegaard. I read just about everything he wrote. Another person I read a good bit of was Paul Tillich. I read a couple of Reinhold Niebuhr’s books.

Shannon: So outside of Seminary, we’re in a period of cultural tension. Can you tell us about it?

Scott: The two big things were Vietnam and Civil Rights. I remember reading the Vietnam Letters with George Anderson, but by 1967, I was in Germany. I hadn’t really taken a position on the matter. The Germans thought it was terrible that America was involved, and they convinced me that they were right. Civil Rights started, though, when I was at Duke. I was there when the sit-ins were in Greensboro. I had friends who went and participated. The schools weren’t segregated until I returned from Germany. That’s when the people in Columbia and throughout the state began building their own schools. We sent our daughter to a mainly black high school. She was in the band and seemed to do okay. But it was anomaly for a white family like us to send a child to a black school.

When I started teaching at seminary, we had no black students. We had some connection with black colleges in Columbia.

Shannon: Tell us how your research made an impact on Lutheranism and how it is understood.

Scott: It was different at different schools. At LTSS, I ended up teaching Lutheran History and Theology. I was there 14 years, and taught that course half of the time. I taught a couple of courses on Luther’s life. At Gettysburg, I taught American Church History. When I got to Philadelphia, I didn’t have to teach American Church History. When I got to Princeton, I did teach Luther’s theology, but I also taught a course on the Radical Reformation and Catholic Reformation. Princeton is a bigger school, so you had more freedom to teach what you wanted.

I always wanted to teach a biography of Luther because I didn't like the ones well enough to use them in a course, and I was never able to teach a whole course on Luther’s life. So when I was invited to write a biography of Luther after I retired, that was very interesting because I learned a lot.

I think the biography has made an impact. I know that some people use it in courses. I also wrote a book, *Recultivating the Vineyard: Reformation Agendas and Christianization.* Most scholars saw the Reformation as groups of separate people and highlight their differences. I argued in it that it is better to see the Reformation as a whole.

After my retirement, my doctoral students gave me a *festschrift*. Each one wrote an essay on this book, *Recultivating the Vineyard*.

Shannon: What did you appreciate about teaching at Southern Seminary, Gettysburg, Philadelphia, and Princeton?

Scott: The three Lutheran seminaries were so much alike. Same courses more or less, and the same services. I can't say that any one was better than the other. There were slight differences among all of them. The chapels were different and had a different life. There weren’t as many Lutheran churches in Philadelphia. There were more in Gettysburg. But it was nothing like Columbia. The big differences were that even before I left Southern, women were enrolling and being ordained. It seemed like there were more women at Gettysburg and Philadelphia. The schools were about the same size.

Philadelphia was the theological seminary. Gettysburg was where you went to learn to be a pastor. I don’t remember what we said about Southern Seminary. But I remember we said that “we make pastors”, and of course we did. On the whole, the seminaries were very much the same.

At Princeton, there were 800 students and 40 faculty members. Very different from what I knew. The theology department was the chief department. But there was a separate history department, and that was my chance to be a part of a history department. I was happy to be with historians. For a historian is was like going to heaven! It was very ecumenical. Some students were very conservative, some were liberal, some didn’t know what they were—like me in college! It was my favorite place. If I could go back, I’d go there. I wish I stayed longer there. I would say that I got just as good as an education at Southern Seminary as I did at Princeton. I got a very good education at Southern Seminary. There just wasn’t the diversity like there is at Princeton.

Shannon: What’s your favorite hymn?

Scott: Well, that’s hard to say. There are so many of them, I love them all.

Shannon: How about your favorite Easter hymn?

Scott: Sing Thy Tongue the Glorious Battle by Venantius Fortunatus, 530-609 B.C.

Shannon: What denomination would you be if you weren’t Lutheran?

Scott: I could not imagine not being Lutheran. 78 years of being Lutheran from the cradle, and will be to the grave. To be ordained and to be a professor, I can’t imagine anything else.

Shannon: Well, Lutheranism is very lucky to have you.

Scott: (Laughs) I don’t know about that, but it’s been a good ride. I’ve had so many good students. Students like Susan McArver. Students I stay in contact with. I’ve been fortunate.

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