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# Integrating Religious and Professional Identities: Christian Faculty at Public Institutions of Higher Education

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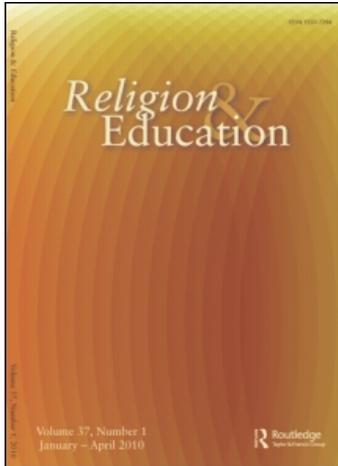
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### Integrating Religious and Professional Identities: Christian Faculty at Public Institutions of Higher Education

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## **Integrating Religious and Professional Identities: Christian Faculty at Public Institutions of Higher Education**

CHRISTY MORAN CRAFT, JOHN D. FOUBERT, and  
JESSICA JELKIN LANE

*The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how Christian faculty members integrate their religious identity with their professional identity within public colleges and universities. Semi-structured interviews with 12 Christian faculty members shed light on their perceived religious “calling” to public higher education, as well as revealed insights as to how they overtly and covertly attempt to express their religious identity within the workplace.*

**KEYWORDS** *Christian, faculty, faith, identity, integration, professional, religious*

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a Foreign Land?”<sup>1</sup>

Within the last 10 years, the topics of spirituality and religion have gained increased attention within higher education. In fact, Nash believes that there

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“appears to be a virtually insatiable need for religious exploration in the academy”,<sup>2</sup> and that this revival of interest in spirituality and religion represents the most vibrant aspect of pluralism on college and university campuses today. This is evidenced by the amount of research that has recently been conducted about the spirituality and religion of college and university students. Much of that research has focused on providing conceptualizations of spirituality and of religion.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have focused on the changing spiritual and religious practices of college students.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to a focus on the conceptualizations of, and practices related to, spirituality and religion, the religious identity of students has been a focus of recent study; Christian students have received the most attention thus far.<sup>5</sup> Campus ministries have also become a topic of interest among both scholars and practitioners.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, there is much less literature about the spirituality and religion of faculty in higher education in spite of several scholars calling for such research. More needs to be known about how faculty view the role of their religion and/or spirituality in their interactions with students and colleagues,<sup>7</sup> as well as about the causal relationship between professors’ religious value commitments and the formation of their ideas.<sup>8</sup>

#### SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION AMONG FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The study of spirituality and religion among faculty in higher education holds much value for the sake of the educational enterprise. For one reason, scholars have suggested that the spiritual component of humans gives rise to questions about why we do what we do, pushes us to seek fundamentally better ways of doing it, and propels us to make a difference in the world.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Palmer<sup>10</sup> suggested that faculty members who attend to their inner lives are more likely to bring their whole selves into their academic work and to serve as role models for students who seek the same wholeness. It stands to reason, then, that spirituality and religion may be salient in the lives of some faculty members in higher education and are worthy of study.

Though very little research exists about the spirituality and religion of faculty, a few researchers have broached that topic. For instance, Ecklund and Scheitle<sup>11</sup> examined the religious and spiritual belief of academics in the natural and social sciences at 21 major universities in the United States. They found that many scientists are, indeed, interested in spirituality, and university scientists who view religion and spirituality as important are beginning to play a crucial role in mediating dialogue between the scientific community and the broader American public. Gross and Simmons<sup>12</sup> also investigated the spiritual and religious beliefs of faculty. In their study, they analyzed data from a nationally representative survey of professors that included 1,471 cases. They found that there is substantial variation in

religiosity from discipline to discipline and across all types of institutions and that religion is prevalent in the professoriate.

Some other studies have highlighted the salience of spirituality and religion among faculty members and how faculty work is influenced by their spiritual and religious beliefs and values. For instance, Lindholm<sup>13</sup> reviewed research from the University of California, Los Angeles's 2003–2004 Higher Education Research Institute faculty survey that involved a sample of 40,679 college and university faculty at 511 campuses. She found that highly spiritual faculty are much more likely than their less spiritual colleagues to score high on the following qualities: focus on students' personal development, civic-minded values, diversity advocacy, student-centered pedagogy, civic-minded practice, and positive outlook on work and life. Additionally, Lindholm, along with Astin, also examined faculty members' preferred teaching practices as one aspect of their professional behavior into which their spirituality may be integrated.<sup>14</sup> They reported that 81% consider themselves to be spiritual, and 47% consider it "essential" or "very important" to integrate spirituality into their lives. Furthermore, they reported that

The teaching methods faculty elect to use reflect who they are and what they believe. In particular, those who are more spiritual are much more likely to use "student-centered" pedagogical methods when teaching undergraduate students. Most importantly, this spiritual effect is largely independent of the faculty member's personal characteristics, field of study, or institutional affiliation.

Indeed, many faculty members are beginning to reflect on how they might connect their religious and spiritual values to their professional roles, without sacrificing either.<sup>15</sup> For many, it seems appropriate to contextualize religious and professional identities within the legal freedoms and constraints that exist at public institutions of higher education.

## LEGAL FREEDOMS AND CONSTRAINTS

In public higher education, perhaps the primary challenge relevant to the integration of spirituality and religion into faculty work relates to the legal implications of doing so. The First Amendment provisions related to religious expression in public higher education institutions are summed up in two clauses: the establishment clause and the free exercise clause.<sup>16</sup> According to the establishment clause, public institutions of higher education cannot advocate for one religion over another; in effect, these institutions must attempt to maintain religious neutrality. The second provision, the free exercise clause, provides for the rights of the individual for religious expression that is free of governmental influence. Public institutions, then, work within

the bounds of the law to permit people within their educational community to express their religious views regardless of their content.

These guidelines raise the perplexing question of how to allow free expression of religious beliefs without “establishing” a religion in public higher education. Many in public higher education may be too cautious about supporting and/or participating in any form of religious expression due to the fact that the tradition, though not constitutional statement, of a “separation of church and state” is often mistakenly believed to mean that any type of religious expression on a public college or university campus will, in effect, “establish” a religion on that particular campus.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that this misunderstanding may be a reason why some faculty members at public institutions are cautious about integrating their religious identity with their professional identity.

Interestingly, there has only been one legal case related to the integration of spirituality and religion into faculty work. In *Bishop v. Aronov*,<sup>18</sup> an exercise physiology professor occasionally referred to his religious beliefs during class time. He also organized an optional after-class meeting, held shortly before the final examination, to discuss “Evidences of God in Human Physiology.” After some students complained, the university required that he discontinue both actions; the professor then challenged the university’s action as violating both his freedom of speech and his freedom of religion. The court ruled that educators have the authority to exercise editorial control over the style and content of professors’ speech in school-sponsored expressive activities so long as their actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concern. Moreover, if a student asks about the spiritual or religious beliefs of a particular professor, that professor may answer the question. Furthermore, optional out-of-class religious activities are allowed as long as they are clearly communicated as being optional, not considered part of the coursework, and not related to grading.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the following research question: How do Christian faculty members integrate their religious identity with their professional identity within the public higher education environment? To that end, concepts related to the social construction and reconstruction of identity provided the theoretical framework upon which this study was grounded. According to Egan-Robertson<sup>19</sup>, identity is fluid, continually being constructed, co-constructed, and reconstructed over time. Moreover, outside influences impact the construction of identity; often, dominant values dictate norms and expectations.<sup>20</sup> According to Torres,<sup>21</sup> the context and interactions with others—including other people and/or expectations that evolve from culture—influence how one constructs one’s

own identity. Although outside influences contribute to the development of an identity, individuals control their identity by constructing the person they want to become.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, the concept of performativity suggests that individuals create and recreate identity through their actions, which are constantly shifting.<sup>23</sup>

## METHOD

To understand how one group of Christian faculty members integrates their religious and professional identities, a phenomenological methodology provided the framework for the design of this study. A phenomenological study “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon.”<sup>24</sup> The phenomenon of the integration of the religious identity and the professional identity among Christian faculty members at public institutions of higher education was the focus of this investigation.

### Procedure

#### SAMPLE

All interviewees in this study were attendees of a conference sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The Faculty Conference 2008: The Role of Spiritual Formation and the Academic Life was held from June 21 to June 27, 2008 at Cedar Campus, located on the shore of Lake Huron in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. “InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA is an evangelical campus mission serving more than 35,000 students and faculty on more than 560 college and university campuses nationwide. Incorporated in 1941, InterVarsity has a rich tradition of campus witness, thoughtful discipleship, and a concern for world missions.”<sup>25</sup>

Phenomenological assumptions suggest that the key informants are those who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation.<sup>26</sup> In accordance with criterion sampling, the interviewees were purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study on the assumption that they, possibly more than other Christian faculty members at public institutions, espouse a salient Christian identity. This assumption seems reasonable given the cost and time that they sacrificed to attend the conference. The investigators presumed that each would have information-rich experiences to share related to the integration of their religious identity into their work on campus.

Maximum variation sampling is commonly used in phenomenological research; the fullest description of the experienced phenomenon results from the intentional selection of participants whose experiences are analyzed in the aggregate.<sup>27</sup> In this study, only Christian faculty members working at public higher education institutions were included in the interviews, though

**TABLE 1** Select Characteristics of the Faculty Participants.

Pseudonym	Rank and/or role	Academic discipline
Jeff	Adjunct Assistant Professor	Educational Administration
Rick	Assistant Professor	Public Administration
Sue	Associate Professor	Counseling Psychology
Brett	Assistant Professor	Economics
Keith	Full Professor	Microbiology
Dave	Associate Professor	Public Administration
Greg	Associate Professor	Chemistry
Mark	Associate Professor	Engineering
Leslie	Full Professor	Industrial/Organizational Psychology
Emma	Associate Professor	Microbiology
Jerry	Assistant Professor	Broadcast Media
Ken	Assistant Professor	Urban and Regional Planning

Christian faculty members from religiously affiliated colleges and universities were also in attendance at the conference. There were 12 participants who were interviewed for this study: three White women and nine White men. The gender and racial representation reflected that of the conference participants as a whole as most in attendance were White men. The 12 interviewees represented various academic disciplines and academic ranks. The faculty members were employed at one of nine colleges and universities in the Midwest; three of the institutions were the place of employment for two faculty members each. The institutions represented by the interviewees are all public and fall into the following Carnegie categories: Master's (3), Doctoral/Research (1), and Research-Very High (5). Detailed information about the sample of participants is displayed in Table 1. Given the sensitive nature of this data, the interviewees requested that their individual names be confidential; therefore, pseudonyms are used for each.

#### DATA COLLECTION

Prior to initiating this study, the primary investigator communicated with two full-time staff working for the Faculty Ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship to request permission to engage in this investigation. Upon receiving their permission, she requested the e-mail addresses of all faculty members from public higher education institutions who had registered for the conference. Then, she sent an e-mail message to each, informing them that she would also be attending the faculty conference and requesting their participation in the study.

Through e-mail communication, interview dates, times, and locations were established between the primary investigator and the respondents. The primary investigator conducted interviews in a quiet location in the main building of the retreat facility; each interview lasted 45 min to 1 hr and was audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol was

semi-structured with open-ended questions designed to elicit the participants' experiences integrating their religious identities with their professional identities. Sample interview questions included the following: How, if at all, does your religious identity influence your professional identity? What opportunities, if any, exist for you to integrate your religious identity with your professional identity? What challenges, if any, do you face as you attempt to integrate those identities? The 12 interviews resulted in 60 pages of transcription.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

To begin the analysis, the primary investigator developed data charts from the interview transcripts. Each chart contained the respondents' exact comments about specific topics relevant to this study. All three investigators used these charts as the basis for the data analysis; they coded and analyzed the data as well as negotiated the interpretations of it. Consistent with the phenomenological methodology, the investigators attempted to "bracket"<sup>28</sup> their preconceptions throughout the data analysis phase in order to truly unearth possible meanings of the participants' language and experiences. The participants' own language is used throughout this narrative to illustrate these meanings and resulting themes.

To analyze the data, the investigators relied upon Lincoln and Guba's<sup>29</sup> inductive method of qualitative data analysis. First, from each data chart, they unitized the data by searching for an element (phrase, sentence, or paragraph) that was heuristic, or "aimed at some understanding" that they, as data analysts, needed to have. Once the data were unitized, units that related to the same content were grouped together into provisional categories. This categorization was achieved through the constant comparative method; units were compared to each other to establish whether they were similar and should be put in the same category or different and should be put into different categories. Finally, each category was reviewed for consistency, and categories were compared to make sure each was unique. The goal was to have categories that were "internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible." After developing categories for each chart, the investigators participated in several conference calls to negotiate and to reconcile discrepancies in their work. From these discussions, themes emerged that accounted for the cross-analyzed, categorized data. These themes form the headings in the presentation of the results of the study.

#### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the results was enhanced through the use of four techniques: triangulation of data sources, triangulation of data analysts, member

checking, and the establishment of an audit trail. First, the inclusion of multiple investigators provided for analyst triangulation.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, member checking involves taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information.<sup>31</sup> To this end, respondents were each sent, via e-mail, a copy of their interview as well as the summary outline of the results of the study. They were asked to provide feedback about the accuracy of the investigators' interpretations. Finally, an audit trail was established; the investigators maintained "precise records of who said what, when, where, and under what conditions."<sup>32</sup>

### Limitations

There are several limitations related to this study that should be noted. First, this study presents a limited view on the complexity of this subject by nature of the fact that other dimensions of social identity were not explored in our inquiry. The ways in which African American Christian faculty, or faculty of another non-majority racial identity, integrate their religious identity with their professional identity are likely different than the experiences of the White participants in this study. Furthermore, additional female participants would have provided the opportunity to closely investigate how gender interacts with both religious and professional identity. Also, though all of the participants in this study self-identified as Christian, little is known about differences in their specific denominational backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

## RESULTS

The Christian faculty in this study seemed eager to discuss the integration of their religious identity with their professional identity. Three primary themes emerged from the data about the integration of those two dimensions of identity. First, the notion of a religious "calling" to integrate their religion with their work within the public university environment was apparent in the data. Second, discussion focused upon the challenges related to overtly embracing and effectively communicating a Christian worldview within their work environment. For that reason, the Christian faculty in this study discussed specific ways in which they covertly integrate their religious identity into their teaching and research; this covert integration represents the final theme that emerged.

### Religious "Calling"

Most of the Christian faculty spoke about the role that their religious identity plays in providing a sense of "calling" to their professional work, the first

theme in our study. Specifically, many discussed sensing a religious calling to the university that served to motivate them at work. For instance, Keith shared the following:

God has called me to work at the university. I can have as much influence there as pastors can in a church, in a way. It sounds kind of mystical, but there's that inner urging. I think even a non-Christian can understand that. There's this desire, this goal, and that's what God puts in people. That basically is what calls them to their profession or where they're to be. (Keith, Full Professor, Microbiology)

From Keith's perspective, his work at the university is no less important than the work of clergy in religious institutions. Greg felt similarly about his work at the university:

I really feel I'm called to the university. I have a strategic opportunity to witness for Christ in the academy, and that is something that not everyone can do. And, so for instance, the calling aspect of this to me is to be the witness that I am supposed to be at all levels. And, so that means doing good research, being a good teacher the way that, you know, Christ would be able to do that. I am strategically placed on the university. I prefer to make sure that I devote my time and energy to opportunities to interact with students on campus rather than be involved in teaching adults in the local church. So I really view this as a calling, and I like the distinction of calling. (Greg, Associate Professor, Chemistry)

Interestingly, Greg repeatedly mentioned the importance of being "strategic" in terms of taking advantage of the opportunity that he has been given to be a "witness for Christ" with students. Leslie also shared about how her calling is focused upon students:

I am at peace with the fact that I believe my calling is to be a Christian mentor for the many...I think about how many Christian students are in secular universities and are thirsting and dying for a faculty member that they respect who's clearly intelligent—a thinking, faculty member who's also a Christian. (Leslie, Full Professor, Industrial/Organizational Psychology)

It is clear, then, that Leslie believes her calling is that of serving as a mentor to Christian university students. A number of other faculty members also mentioned the specific calling to assist Christian university students by serving as

professional mentors to those who seek Christian role models within the public institution environment.

### Overtly Communicating a Christian Worldview

A second theme that emerged from the data for this study revolved around the desire to overtly and effectively communicate a Christian worldview within public university environments. A number of faculty participants acknowledged the credibility of their Christian worldview but expressed concerns about how to appropriately communicate it to others. For instance, Rick shared the following:

I think if you cross a line where all of a sudden you're seen as, you know, proselytizing or trying to do that, [it] can be more damaging to the whole structure of the interconnection with faith. I've witnessed people who tried to maybe push their faith a little too hard, and then, then a wall goes up and reputation... People steer clear. I don't want that to happen. (Rick, Assistant Professor, Public Administration)

Keith has come to the following conclusion where that particular challenge is concerned:

Christian faculty have to speak in a way that's gracious. Her [pointing to his wife] dad was a Ph.D. social psychologist. And, he would always quote John 1:14. It stuck with me. The last part... "Jesus came full of grace and truth." You know, he revealed himself full of graciousness and truth. We have to speak out the truth, but we have to do it in a gracious manner. Don't allow the whole conversation to be dictated by the other side. (Keith, Full Professor, Microbiology)

As the issue of overtly communicating a Christian worldview within the public university setting was discussed during the conference, faculty participants made a number of references to a perceived need to "do more" in an effort to communicate their religious identity in their professional work. For instance, Mark spoke of his need to "get the Gospel out there" (i.e., evangelize) more. He said,

For me, I don't think it's enough just to do my work. Although that's a big part of it, sometimes God just puts a desire to think about how I can get the Gospel out there or how I can, you know, build some foundations that he can use to bring people to him. I wouldn't be comfortable with just trying to do work. It's [work] something that God cares about, and so do I, but again I think almost everyone God gives opportunities to be a witness and an instrument of God's love. (Mark, Associate Professor, Engineering)

Keith echoed Mark's thoughts:

I wish I could take more opportunity where I am. To be a missionary where you work, that's a different thing and that's where I probably need to . . . to do more. (Keith, Full Professor, Microbiology)

The need to do more was expressed while also recognizing the potential hardship and resistance that could result from such efforts. One of the faculty members seemed convinced that he would face hardship that could end up being detrimental to his career if he were to openly communicate his religious identity:

If I talked or wrote about Jesus publicly, I could not get tenure. I am fully convinced that if I were outed as a committed evangelical, it would be nearly impossible for me to get tenure. There's sufficient enough data of other faculty tenure decisions and even hostilities toward tenured faculty who are publicly Christian to make one a little nervous. I sense that at most large, public, research universities, there is more than just the idea that Jesus is irrelevant. There's an open hostility to Christianity, at least in the social and human sciences. So, any integration of faith and learning I do is for my own personal benefit until I get tenure. (Ken, Assistant Professor, Urban and Regional Planning)

Ken was so adamant about this possible retribution that he asserted his desire to remain anonymous in the writing of this research study.

### Covertly Integrating Religious Faith with Research and Teaching

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the challenges related to overtly communicating a Christian worldview within the public university environment, many of the faculty participants discussed ways in which they were more subtle, or covert, in the integration of their religious identity with their professional identity. This subtle, covert integration of religious faith with research and teaching constituted the third and final theme in the study. Many shared specific examples of how they integrate biblical principles, albeit without revealing the source of those principles, into their research. Some, like Brett, discussed how his religious identity, though expressed covertly, influences the focus of his research:

My research has an impact on the greater world in terms of economic development. The topics I pick are ones to try . . . When Paul wrote Titus, he said, "First, pray for those in positions of authority." So my research has been designed to improve, to have a real impact on, decision-making at the local level. (Brett, Assistant Professor, Economics)

Leslie also shared about how research ideas can emerge from her religious identity:

With my research, with emotions, it's such a nice tie to my theological passions, because I can play around with it while I'm reading scripture [the Bible] and thinking about Jesus. I do get ideas when I think about my faith and my scripture readings and emotions, and I get ideas that are testable. I'd love to write about Jesus and emotions from an academic standpoint. I'd love to. I'd love to take a look at, for example, anger. I'm fascinated with anger. I think people have horrible misperceptions about it, but anyway, I'd love to trace anger throughout the whole Old and New Testaments . . . and perceptions of it [anger]. And, I'd love to contrast different emotions of Jesus. (Leslie, Full Professor, Industrial/Organizational Psychology)

Similarly, others such as Sue discussed how their religious identity influences the lens through which they conceptualize important phenomena in their research. In particular, she uses Jesus's life as an example of ideal ethical behavior:

One of the areas that I've done research in, and continue to be very interested in, is professional ethics. And, to me, the most ethical person in the whole wide world is Jesus. How he treated people, how he understood relationships . . . And then having the broader sense of what does it mean to treat people from an ethical lens. (Sue, Associate Professor, Counseling Psychology)

Finally, Ken provided a clear example of how his religious identity informs both his research and his teaching but also how that integration must be kept subtle:

My faith, as it works out in my teaching and research is fundamentally committed to social justice, and I take that to have the two elements of concern for the poor and concern for the environment. In my research, I have worked out a rough outline of biblical concepts of some of the issues I deal with: justice but also land ethics. And, that directed me into what elements to study. I hope that the research topics that I choose to focus on are somewhat informed by biblical conceptions, but you'll never see me quote the Bible in a research article. (Ken, Assistant Professor, Urban and Regional Planning)

So, Ken covertly utilized biblically based conceptualizations in his teaching and research about issues surrounding social justice.

## DISCUSSION

Scholars from most disciplines bring interpretive frames of reference to their work in the academy.<sup>33</sup> Just as one's race and gender can illuminate a scholar's work, so too can one's religious beliefs and commitments. Religious and spiritual convictions may even ground a sense of personal vocation for some scholars. Indeed, the results of this investigation support such assertions.

The faculty participants in this study discussed the phenomenon of the integration of their religious identity with their professional identity by first elaborating upon their view of their career as a religious "calling." Furthermore, they highlighted challenges related to overtly communicating a Christian worldview and shared examples of how they covertly integrate their religious faith into their teaching and research. It seems that the perceived religious calling of the participants propels them to more fully and covertly integrate their religion into their work but that they feel hindered within their profession. Thus, they feel that they must be more covert to appease their personal convictions and to fulfill their calling. All of the aforementioned findings are intriguing when framed in the context of existing literature about the diminishing presence of religion in public higher education as well as literature related to the equally important concepts of worldview fit and identity capital.<sup>34</sup>

### Diminishing Presence of Religion in Public Higher Education

As mentioned earlier when discussing the theoretical framework for the study, outside influences impact the construction of identity. Dominant values may dictate norms and expectations.<sup>35</sup> The findings of this study illuminate how the prevailing values within public higher education institutions, as perceived by the faculty participants, provide a context in which the faculty in this study constructed their identity as both Christians and faculty members.

Several scholars have written about the belief that society in general and higher education in particular are becoming increasingly more secularized.<sup>36</sup> According to Speers, this secularization has resulted in the transformation of religion such that it is more privatized. Marsden captured that same sentiment in his statement, "People of diverse cultures are welcomed into respectable academic cultures, but only on the condition that they leave the religious dimensions of their cultures at the door."<sup>37</sup> According to Chickering, it is our "overwhelming valuation of rational empiricism—a conception of truth as objective and external—and of knowledge as commodity" that "delegitimizes active public discussions" of religion and spirituality in higher education.<sup>38</sup> In some circles, religious inquiries are not even considered to be intellectual endeavors in the academy;<sup>39</sup> the intellect is favored over the soul,<sup>40</sup> and attention to the human spirit has decreased in importance in

liberal learning.<sup>41</sup> Such views are sharply disputed by scholars who offer rational and empirical evidence for their religious inquiry including such matters as the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, and historical accuracy of the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

### Worldview Fit

In spite of their perceptions of the diminishing presence of religion in public higher education, the participants in this study communicated ways in which they integrated their religious and professional identities within the workplace. Related to this integration process is the concept of worldview fit. Bowman and Nevis defined a *worldview* as “how we apprehend the world—how we are involved in it, perceive it, and bring our personal history to bear in it.”<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the religious beliefs of the Christian faculty members in this study comprised their overall worldview.

In their research with students, Morris, Beck, and Mattis used the term worldview fit to describe the “perceived ideological compatibility” between the student and the institution.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, they conceptualized worldview as consisting of religious, moral, and political dimensions. What became evident in this study is the perceived lack of worldview fit between these Christian faculty members and the public higher education environment.

A number of faculty members spoke about this lack of worldview fit. For instance, Leslie mentioned the dearth of Christian faculty as she spoke of Christian students’ desires for mentors. Several faculty members (Dave, Ken) went so far as to suggest that the public university environment in which they each work presents them with hardship and resistance due to the fact that they are Christians. Ken even mentioned an “open hostility” toward Christian faculty that could result in Christian faculty being denied tenure if they are too public about their religious identity.

To be sure, other scholars have suggested that public college and university environments are not amenable to the religious identity and perspectives of faculty members. For instance, in her research with faculty, Ecklund found that about 45% of her participants disagreed with the idea that the scholars in their fields have positive attitudes toward religion. These faculty members mentioned “unspoken barriers” against discussing religion in academic settings, even in informal university settings outside of the classroom.<sup>45</sup>

Faculty members who have served as participants in other research studies expressed similar concerns, focusing upon the structural and cultural limitations that their professional and institutional work environments imposed.<sup>46</sup> So, how then, do Christian faculty members who perceive a lack of a worldview fit integrate their religious and professional identities within such a context? The choices that they make in this integration process seemingly relate to the fascinating concept of identity capital.

## Identity Capital

As mentioned in the discussion of the theoretical framework for this study, the construction of identity is influenced by one's context and interaction with others.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, according to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, identity is situated within "socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others."<sup>48</sup> Within certain contexts, some identities are more or less valued than others; people who demonstrate the characteristics associated with a valued identity in a specific context gain identity capital.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, Wortham stated that acquiring and embodying valued identity capital generally results in greater success and more advantages than resisting the valued norms or otherwise failing to exhibit them.<sup>50</sup>

As the Christian faculty members in this study discussed challenges related to their attempts to covertly integrate their religion into their professional work, they indirectly communicated their belief that the public university environment placed higher value on non-religious perspectives than on religious worldviews. They apparently have come to the belief that their religious identity is not highly valued within the public university atmosphere. In effect, the Christian faculty members in this study recognize their lack of identity capital. Yet, they make a deliberate decision to construct a salient religious identity therein in spite of its lack of value.

This decision on the part of the Christian faculty members in this study reflects Hall and Burns's contention that individuals "are always capable of making their own decisions about how to act. To varying extents, people may choose how they wish to be positioned and acquire or reject the capital connected to particular identities."<sup>51</sup> Given the lack of worldview fit with the prevailing values of public higher education, the attempts made by the Christian faculty participants in this study to integrate their religious identity with their professional identity reflect a conscious decision on their part to reject identity capital therein. The religious "calling" about which they spoke apparently supersedes their desire to maintain and/or to increase their individual identity capital within the public university environment.

## Future Research

This study began to identify critical themes for how Christian faculty members integrate their religious and professional lives in public higher education institutions. However, there are still many questions without answers. For instance, what types of situations are particularly challenging to the faith and work of Christian faculty within their campus roles? How do they negotiate these dilemmas? Also, to what extent are faculty members who work in public higher education familiar with the legal freedoms and constraints related

to religious expression therein? Interestingly, only one of the faculty participants in this study even alluded to legal issues regarding the expression of religion in public institutions; Rick simply discussed his desire not to “cross the line.”

Furthermore, this study identified elements of Christian faculty having a sense of calling, communicating a Christian worldview, and integrating their religious worldview into research and teaching; however, elements of the process of how these things take place are areas yet to be fully explored. For example, how does a faculty member go about integrating their religious identity into their research and teaching? Are there distinctions between faculty members who make this a more overt versus a covert process? Do these distinctions have religious components? Further research might also apply similar questions to faculty from other religious traditions, though gaining an understanding of those religious traditions first before inquiring about how faculty function within those contexts would be necessary for a properly contextualized study.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian faculty members in this study described how they attempt to integrate their religious and professional identities within public university environments that are characterized by values that are incongruent with the Christian worldview. They do so knowing that they are rejecting identity capital in the process. The findings of this study support Lindsey’s assertion that the desire of most Christian faculty is not to “take back” the country for their faith but simply to have their faith seen as reasonable, genuine, and attractive.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned earlier, others have suggested the value in the integration of spirituality into work,<sup>53</sup> even reporting that faculty members who are more spiritual tend to incorporate more student-centered pedagogical methods into their classrooms.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, then, religion and spirituality may have a positive influence in the educational process.

According to Mayes, the founders of our nation never intended to exclude or separate religion from the state; rather, they neither wanted to privilege a particular religious perspective nor to exclude secular perspectives.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, according to De Russy, many in higher education have misrepresented the founders’ intent. She stated that the liberal ideal itself is being rejected within the university setting: The belief that education and wisdom are best achieved when competing truth claims can be advanced in a tolerant atmosphere, where scholarship is not judged according to secular dogma, and where a full-range of opinions are offered on the basis of rigorous scholarly inquiry.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, she asserted that the freedom to learn must allow committed believers of the faculty to bring religious wisdom to bear on a whole range of intellectual questions.

Indeed, religion can extend the pluralism that liberal values cherish, and it can enrich knowledge.<sup>57</sup> The need to support, and even encourage the integration of religious identities with professional identities is evident; such encouragement may lead to an extension of pluralism as well as the expansion and enrichment of knowledge. The Christian faculty members in this study refused to surrender their religious worldview within the context of public university environments. Such a refusal to surrender one's moral beliefs to the authority of others is "a trait that liberal politics should value, not oppose, for it yields precisely the diversity that America needs."<sup>58</sup>

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