

Integrating Faith and Work

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Christians sometimes separate work and faith into secular and spiritual spheres. But recent studies show that if faith-work integration is emphasized in congregations, members experience work more positively and contribute positively to their workplace.

In the beginning of time there was work: God worked and he determined that humankind would work as part of their fellowship with him. The Fall broke this perfect fellowship and corrupted work, but it did not fatally sever the relationship between worship and work. Despite work being part of what we are called to do in fellowship with God, over time Christians have sometimes integrated work and worship, while at other times they have separated the two into secular and spiritual spheres. Historian Alexis de Tocqueville and sociologist Max Weber are among those who have asserted faith influences work, with particular attention to how faith influences the motivation for and success of entrepreneurial endeavors. However, these assertions and other ideas related to how religious faith might inform our understanding of and practices of work and entrepreneurial behavior have been largely ignored or dismissed by business scholars.¹

Together with colleague Jerry Park and graduate students from sociology, we set out to investigate the state of connections between work and faith among adult workers in the United States. Funded by a National Science Foundation grant, we engaged in a multi-phase research project to explore the relationship of religion and entrepreneurial behavior.² The initial phase of the project involved adding work-related items to the Baylor Religion Survey, a highly regarded national study of beliefs and values in the United States. From this survey, we discovered that less than half (47%) of employed

adults who attend religious services monthly or more indicated that they often or always see connections between faith and work. In the second phase of the project we investigated the relationships between a broader set of religious and work variables in our National Survey of Work, Entrepreneurship, and Religion, a nationally representative sample of full-time employed adults. In this sample of full-time workers, we found that 61% of those regularly attending a religious service agreed that their work honors God. These preliminary analyses point to some level of faith-work integration for many adult workers but also a disconnection for many others. The third phase of our research took us inside American churches. We visited ten congregations across the United States and conducted interviews with full-time workers and entrepreneurs in each congregation. Our interviews allowed us to dig deeper into the ways that church-going Americans integrate their faith and work.

ADULT WORKERS

One of our main interests was to understand how faith-work integration influences attitudes and behaviors in the workplace for a broad range of workers. Drawing on Baylor Religion Survey data, Katie Halbesleben and I (Neubert) crafted a paper, "Called to Commitment: An Examination of Relationships Between Spiritual Calling, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment,"³ that explored how a subset of items from Lynn and colleagues' faith integration scale explained job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the workplace.⁴ The subset of items we used related to spiritual calling in the workplace. We defined spiritual calling as a summons from God to approach work with a sense of purpose and a pursuit of excellence in work practices. Analyzing a national random sample of 771 adults yielded significant positive associations between spiritual calling and both job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment, even after accounting for a number of demographic, religious, and workplace control variables. Job satisfaction is the attitude an individual holds toward his or her particular job, whereas affective organizational commitment is the volitional attachment or bond an individual has with an organization. Both job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment are important because they contribute positively to job performance and decrease forms of job withdrawal such as absenteeism and turnover. In this study we also demonstrated that affective organizational commitment is at its strongest when both spiritual calling and job satisfaction are strong; yet a strong sense of spiritual calling contributes to affective organizational commitment even if an individual's job is not very satisfying.

In another study using Baylor Religion Survey data, "Religious Orthodoxy and Entrepreneurial Risk-Taking,"⁵ graduate student Todd Ferguson led an investigation of the relationship of religious orthodoxy with the propensity to take risks at work. Religious orthodoxy was defined as a belief in

God as the ultimate external and eternal authority for what is right and wrong. Risk taking was assessed by questions related to an individual's propensity to risk loss to gain positive outcomes. Historically, there are divergent views and findings related to the role of religion in risk taking, particularly entrepreneurship. The results of this study indicate that a specific belief, religious orthodoxy, was negatively associated with risk-taking propensity at work. This result among workers in organizations may lend support for those who would argue that religion hinders entrepreneurial behavior, which is seemingly an undesirable conclusion for those promoting faith-work integration, or it might lend support for faith being a factor influencing prudence and wise stewardship of resources. Regardless of the interpretation, this finding affirms the importance of assessing specific beliefs in determining the relationship between faith and work outcomes.

Developing specific measures of religious beliefs pertaining to work was the purpose of another of our early studies. In "Beliefs About Faith and Work: Development and Validation of Honoring God and Prosperity Gospel Scales,"⁶ we developed two short scales to assess theological beliefs related to whether an individual's work is honoring to God and whether God promises financial prosperity to faithful believers. In contrast to general measures of religious affiliation, these more specific measures are useful in identifying unique relationships with work variables. Our analyses indicated a positive relationship of workplace entrepreneurial behavior with beliefs about honoring God in

work, but there was not a significant association with prosperity gospel beliefs.

Honoring God in work beliefs were positively associated with helping behavior in the workplace, whereas prosperity gospel beliefs were negatively related to helping behavior. In other words, beliefs about honoring God in work seem to contribute to creative and collaborative behavior at work, while prosperity gospel beliefs have no relationship with creative behavior and seem to discourage collaborative behavior.

In a working paper entitled "Beliefs about Work: Emperors With and Without Clothes,"⁷ the relationships of honoring God in work and prosperity gospel beliefs with work behaviors and attitudes were explored in more detail. In our nationally representative sample of full-time working adults,

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we found that after controlling for a range of demographic and personality variables, honoring God beliefs were positively associated with helping, entrepreneurial behavior, affective commitment to the organization, and the tendency to look for and recognize opportunities to innovate. Prosperity gospel beliefs had no association with entrepreneurial behavior and affective commitment, while they had a negative association with helping, the tendency to look for and recognize opportunities to innovate, and a measure of work performance. In short, prosperity beliefs do not seem to deliver on their promise in work, quite to the contrary of some proponents' promises.

Looking across these studies of the relationships between faith beliefs and work outcomes for working adults, it is clear that beliefs matter, but it is important to measure specific beliefs. Believing God will provide financial prosperity is either unrelated to work attitudes or contributes to passive or selfish behavior, whereas believing that one is called to work or that work honors God is positively related to important work attitudes and constructive work behaviors.

ENTREPRENEURS

Central to our research project was our interest in exploring relationships between faith and work for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs, as specific types of workers who start businesses, have a prominent role in the economy and in popular culture. Entrepreneurs have unique characteristics and motivations, and we expected that faith may play a role in why they start businesses and how they go about their work. In a study by our research team, "A Religious Profile of American Entrepreneurs,"⁸ we analyzed data from the Baylor Religion Survey and discovered few differences in matters of faith between those who do not start businesses and those who are trying to start or have started businesses. The two groups of workers differ little on measures of religious affiliation, church attendance, or even in belief in God. However, entrepreneurs do tend to pray more frequently, are more likely to attend a place of worship that encourages business activity, and are more likely to see God as engaged and personal. The reasons for these differences are not apparent from our survey, but in comparison to non-entrepreneurs it seems reasonable to think that those who put their money, and possibly their livelihood, at risk to engage in the uncertain work of starting a new business would be more prone to seek guidance or ask for help from a God they believe is engaged in their lives.

Our research team extended the investigation of the role of faith among entrepreneurs through a series of interviews. In an exploratory study, researcher Jenna Griebel Rogers interviewed thirty Christian entrepreneurs in Colorado. The entrepreneurs were asked to reflect on how faith influenced their decision to start a business and how faith shaped their business practices. The co-authored article that resulted, "Faith and Work: An Exploratory Study of Religious Entrepreneurs,"⁹ pointed to a common theme of entre-

preneurs starting businesses and running them in ways that express values central to their faith. Starting a business allowed more flexibility to accommodate work and family conflicts or it allowed entrepreneurs to create organizational cultures that treated others with respect or focused on helping others. In other words, entrepreneurship was a means to align faith and their work, reducing the tension between the two that existed in other work environments.

Jenna Griebel Rogers continued her work studying entrepreneurs in her dissertation, "Religion and Entrepreneurship: The Role of Religious Beliefs and Values on Female Entrepreneurship."¹⁰ As a member of our team during our congregational-interviews phase of our research, she was able to interview a sample of thirty-seven employed women, sixteen of whom were entrepreneurs. Her dissertation offers a glimpse of the unique motives and challenges of female workers and entrepreneurs. Despite working full-time, many of the women indicated that their faith compelled them to prioritize family commitments, particularly raising children. They regularly experienced conflict between work and family demands. For some women, the desire to gain flexibility to meet their competing demands led to starting a business. For those who were employed by others, faith offered them the support and strength to juggle these demands.

The idea of men and women of faith starting businesses and their faith influencing how they operate their businesses raised another question for our research team: How might potential employees react to an entrepreneur explicitly stating that their motive for starting a business was to honor God or that they intended to honor God in all their business practices? A colleague, Matt Wood, and I (Neubert) explored this question. In a working paper, "Espoused Religious Values and Applicant Job Pursuit Intentions,"¹¹ we tested the notion from person-organization theory that applicants with high levels of faith-work integration would find a job at an integrated entrepreneur's company attractive, whereas those with low levels of faith-work integration would find the job unattractive. Our results confirmed this notion, suggesting that entrepreneurs who explicitly communicate their intentions to integrate faith and work should be aware that it is likely to reduce the pool of applicants interested in working for them. Alternatively, for those who believe that an entrepreneur's faith-work integration fits with their own values, research on fit suggests these employees will not only accept a job offer but also will be more likely to be fully engaged at work and stay with the organization longer.

MANIFESTATIONS OF FAITH-WORK INTEGRATION

In our survey research and in the initial explorations of the full set of congregational interviews we find narratives of faith-work integration that fit with the framework espoused by David Miller.¹² His framework, drawn from researching faith and work movements past and present, identifies *ethics*,

experience, enrichment, and expression as the most common manifestations of faith-work integration. Ethics refers to faith motivating ethical behavior and excellence within the workplace. Experience refers to faith offering meaning to work as a place to live out one's calling and a context for utilizing one's unique gifts and talents in serving others. Enrichment refers to faith assisting in work by providing strength, guidance, and the capability to cope with difficulties or suffering. Expression refers to faith being shared in word and deed as an example or witness to others. Our research affirms that these manifestations of faith are present among those we surveyed and interviewed.

These manifestations of integrating faith and work have precedent in Scripture. An example of each type of integration is evident in the First Epistle of Peter, which was written to believers scattered through many towns and workplaces of the day. Peter describes a process of enrichment in which faith helps us as we "suffer grief in all kinds of trials" and our suffering develops our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV). Peter provides an ethical mandate rooted in the character of God and our relationship to him as his children: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1:14-16, NIV). The encouragement to express faith in the context of work is evident in the charge: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (3:15, NIV). Finally, the experience of being called to serve out of the gifts we have been given is affirmed in the exhortation to "use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (4:10, NIV). It may be a fair critique to suggest these exhortations relate to behavior in the Church, but it also seems reasonable to suggest they relate to behavior outside of the Church, which would include workplaces of that day and of today. Moreover, the identity we have as followers of Christ as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (2:9, NIV), reinforces the importance of manifesting faith in relationships outside the Church.

Building on the assumption that faith is intended to be made manifest in workplaces, another question arises: To what extent are congregations emphasizing these forms of integration? In a subsample from our survey of full-time workers consisting of working adults who attended church regularly, 63% agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted the ethical manifestation of "considering what is morally right when facing a tough decision at work." Following next in frequency was a question associated with enrichment, with 57% who agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted "drawing on my faith to help me deal with difficult work relationships." Expression, as measured by a question about their congregation promoting "letting my coworkers know I am a person of faith," yielded 42% of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed. Finally, 38%

agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted “viewing my work as a partnership with God,” which represents the experience of a fully integrated calling at work.

Although there is room for improvement in congregations promoting faith-work integration, when it does occur there are notable implications for workers in doing their work. In a study led by Jerry Park, “Workplace-Bridging Religious Capital: Connecting Congregations to Work Outcomes,”¹⁴ we found in our National Survey of Work, Entrepreneurship, and Religion that the promotion of faith-work integration in congregations is associated with greater job satisfaction, entrepreneurial behavior within the organization, and commitment to the organization. Furthermore, these associations were strongest for more frequent attenders. Our chapter in the *Handbook of Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace* extends these findings.¹⁵ We analyzed the same survey data and found that faith-work integration in congregations is positively related to an entrepreneurial mindset that seeks out opportunities for innovation and to Protestant work ethic beliefs regarding ethical behavior, asceticism, and the value of hard work over leisure.

This brings us full circle. Faith-work integration that is emphasized and promoted in congregations appears to influence, in part, the faith-work integration beliefs of those in attendance, who in turn experience work more positively and contribute positively to their workplace. In sum, the integration of faith and work exists and, where it exists, it matters for individuals and the organizations in which they work.

NOTES

1 Paul Tracey, “Religion and Organization: A Critical Review of Current Trends and Future Directions,” *The Academy of Management Annals*, 6:1 (June 2012), 87-134.

2 This article is based on research supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant #0925907. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

3 Mitchell J. Neubert and Katie Halbesleben, “Called to Commitment: An Examination of Relationships Between Spiritual Calling, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment,” *Journal of Business Ethics* (September 2014), 1-14.

4 Monty L. Lynn, Michael J. Naughton, and Steve VanderVeen, “Faith at Work Scale (FWS): Justification, Development, and Validation of a Measure of Judeo-Christian Religion in the Workplace,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 85:2 (March 2009), 227-243.

5 Todd W. Ferguson, Kevin D. Dougherty, and Mitchell J. Neubert, “Religious Orthodoxy and Entrepreneurial Risk-Taking,” *Sociological Focus*, 47:1 (January 2014), 32-44.

6 Mitchell J. Neubert, Kevin D. Dougherty, Jerry Z. Park, and Jenna Griebel, “Beliefs About Faith and Work: Development and Validation of Honoring God and Prosperity Gospel Scales,” *Review of Religious Research*, 56:1 (March 2014), 129-146.

7 Mitchell J. Neubert and Kevin D. Dougherty, “Beliefs about Work: Emperors With and Without Clothes,” Working Paper, Baylor University.

8 Kevin D. Dougherty, Mitchell J. Neubert, Jenna Griebel, and Jerry Z. Park, “A Religious Profile of American Entrepreneurs,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 52:2 (June 2013), 401-409.

9 Jenna M. Griebel, Jerry Z. Park, and Mitchell J. Neubert, "Faith and Work: An Exploratory Study of Religious Entrepreneurs," *Religions*, 5:3 (2014), 780-800.

10 Jenna Griebel Rogers, "Religion and Entrepreneurship: The Role of Religious Beliefs and Values on Female Entrepreneurship," (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 2014).

11 Mitchell J. Neubert and Matt Wood, "Espoused Religious Values and Applicant Job Pursuit Intentions," Working Paper, Baylor University.

12 David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

13 Scripture passages marked "NIV" are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

14 Jerry Z. Park, Jenna Griebel Rogers, Mitchell J. Neubert, and Kevin D. Dougherty, "Workplace-Bridging Religious Capital: Connecting Congregations to Work Outcomes," *Sociology of Religion*, 75:2 (Summer 2014), 309-331.

15 Mitchell J. Neubert and Kevin D. Dougherty, "Christian Perspectives on Faith at Work: An Empirical Exploration of Faith and Work Associations across Religious Traditions," in Judi Neal, ed., *Handbook of Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace: Emerging Research and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2013), 47-67.



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