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Author(s): Larry Lyon, Michael Beaty, James Parker, Carson Mencken

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Faculty Attitudes on Integrating Faith and Learning at Religious Colleges and Universities: A Research Note

Larry Lyon*
Michael Beaty
James Parker
Carson Mencken
Baylor University

Reflecting the broader secularization debates, considerable research and disagreement exists over the degree to which religious higher education is distinct from its secular counterpart. One crucial and controversial way in which religious colleges and universities can differ from the secular academy is to integrate faith and learning by including faith-based perspectives in the core curriculum. Faculty surveys from six religious colleges and universities reveal a separatist camp and an integrationist camp. We use logistic regression to examine faculty positions on integrating faith and learning. Among the most powerful predictors of faculty attitudes are the type of institution (research university or liberal arts college) and the denomination of the faculty member (same as the denomination that sponsors the school or different).

The nature of and prospects for religious colleges and universities has been intensely and widely discussed. Four of the most important works on the matter are George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (1994), Douglas Sloan's *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (1994), Philip Gleason's *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (1995), and James Burtchaell's massive *The Dying of the Light* (1998). All four agree that over the course of the 20th century, American higher education became increasingly secular, with many church-related colleges and universities becoming largely indistinguishable from their nonreligious counterparts. The religious aims and practices (faith) became separated from the academic goals (learning), leading to a marginalization and even elimination of distinctive faith-based higher education. Taken together, the story these scholars tell is of first

*Direct correspondence to Larry Lyon, Graduate School, Baylor University, Waco, Texas 76798.
E-mail: Larry.Lyon@Baylor.edu.

Protestant, and then Catholic colleges and universities, both large and small, research universities and liberal arts colleges, evolving into institutions that reflect the modern university's understanding of the academic profession—a self-understanding in which religion is viewed at best as separate and irrelevant or at worst an obstacle to education.

Despite these studies, many scholars now argue that it is not inevitable that religious colleges and universities must be transformed into secular institutions in order to achieve academic quality (McMurtrie 2000).¹ And, research is emerging to support the proposition that religiously-based higher education is not necessarily inferior to secular higher education (Hughes and Adrian 1997; Benne 2001; Mixon, Lyon, and Beaty 2004). Still, it does not follow that because religious colleges are not inferior to their secular counterparts, religious higher education is essentially different, either in theory or practice. Notre Dame might achieve parity with the University of Chicago, or Baylor with Vanderbilt, by becoming just like these schools, at least in curricular areas. This begs key questions: Are religious schools different academically? Should faculty and curriculum at religious universities be expected to reflect the religious traditions of the institution?

INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING: AN OLD AND OUTRAGEOUS IDEA

Efforts to relate a religiously informed account of reality to standard academic practices are typically referred to as “integrating faith and learning.” In the 19th century, both Catholic and Protestant higher education shared the assumption of the unity of truth, and thus regarded faith and learning as legitimate concerns of the college or university (Gleason 1995; Reuben 1996). During the 20th century, however, colleges and universities assumed responsibility for learning while the church became the sole guardian of faith (Sloan 1994), leaving little room for distinctive faith-based higher education. Marsden, in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (1997:42), argued that if “teachers’ religious viewpoints are relevant to their academic interpretation, there is no reason why they should not have the freedom to say so” but admitted that most faculty would see such a pedagogical approach as “outrageous.” Fisher (1995) studied the curricula of 69 colleges affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, compared them with offerings at secular schools, and found little difference in what was being taught. After examining seven theological/ecclesiological traditions, Burtchaell (1998) concluded that a significant factor in the secularization of faith-based higher education is that most academics have lost interest in integrating faith and learning.

¹ This reassessment of secularization is part of a larger trend in the sociology of religion (e.g., Warner 1993; Stark 1999).

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACULTY

Whether or not faith and learning are integrated at religious colleges and universities depends increasingly on the faculty who often regard themselves as independent professionals committed to their discipline rather than to their universities and its sponsoring bodies, and who, through committees, largely control hiring and the curriculum (Jencks and Riesman 1968; Stinchcombe 1990; Schrag 2000). It seems clear that religious colleges and universities can be academically distinguishable from their secular counterparts if faculty attempt to integrate faith and learning in their teaching, resulting in a curriculum with distinctive elements. Thus, our research seeks to determine if faculty at religious colleges and universities are committed to the integration of faith and learning and if they are prepared to do so in the classroom and the curriculum. To contend that the *future* of religious higher education depends on the answers to these questions might be an overstatement, but the *nature* of religious higher education certainly depends on how faculty answer these questions.

DATA AND METHODS

Our attempt to answer these questions relies on a survey of faculty at six faith-sponsored institutions.² We selected these schools to represent much of the significant variation in religious colleges and universities (e.g., research universities vs. liberal arts colleges, Catholic vs. Protestant, urban vs. rural). The surveys were mailed to all full-time faculty at Baylor University, Boston College, Brigham Young University, Georgetown College, the University of Notre Dame, and Samford University. These surveys have been described and used previously to analyze faculty opinion by school (Lyon, Beaty, and Mixon 2002). The research reported here, however, focuses on faith and learning by combining surveys from *all six schools* to create a large sample with 1,902 faculty respondents, allowing more detailed and complex statistical analysis than would be available for any one school.³

We measure faculty opinion on the integration of faith and learning with responses to the following questions:

² Following O'Connell (2002), by "faith-sponsored institutions" we mean schools in which the religion of the founding or sponsoring religious group has some direct and observable influence. Influence will be "direct and observable" when the school has: 1) a mission statement that claims a religious heritage, 2) a mission statement that mentions a religious goal, and 3) at least one required course reflecting the school's religious identity. Such a definition would, for example, include Notre Dame, but exclude Duke. For an application of this definition to all private national universities, see Mixon, Lyon, and Beaty (2004).

³ Although available comparisons between official university records and our sample suggest a close correspondence, the goal is not to describe faculty opinion at particular faith-based schools. The goal, rather, is to explain the variation in these opinions.

To help integrate faith and learning, some courses in the *SCHOOL NAME* core curriculum, beyond those in religion, should include discussions of Christian perspectives: (Check all those with which you agree.) ___ on God (in philosophy, for example); ___ on the nature of the universe (in physics, for example); ___ on society (in sociology, for example); ___ on human beings (in biology and psychology, for example); ___ as opportunities arise in the various disciplines, but not systematically, in most disciplines.

The statements are sequenced in a way that allows respondents to choose a broad and abstract integration of faith and learning (e.g., in philosophy) or a more focused and tangible integration (e.g., in biology and psychology). We assumed that most faculty would take positions between the two end points, and that responses would tend to skew away from the integrationist end of the continuum. We were wrong.

The responses displayed in Figure 1 show most faculty responding in the most inclusive or exclusive way possible—either accepting the systematic inclusion of faith in all types of curriculum, or rejecting its systematic inclusion in each of the first four examples. A surprisingly large number of respondents (827 or 48.5%) checked that they agreed with the first four statements; 612 (36%) respondents did not agree with any of the first four statements, choosing only statement five or rejecting all of the possible types of integration.⁴ Only 285 respondents chose positions between the two extremes.

Rather than making choices at some point along a continuum, most faculty at religious schools opt instead for a high level of cognitive consistency (cf. Abelson 1968) in which faith and learning are always systematically integrated or never integrated in a systematic way. They are either integrationist in their view of the curriculum, supporting Christian interpretations throughout the core curriculum, or they are separatist, viewing the systematic inclusion of Christian perspectives as inappropriate anywhere in the core curricula. Within the separatist camp are faculty who think that faith might be included on occasion, but never systematically and only when deemed appropriate by the faculty member. Others in the separatist camp would reject even voluntary integration, but all reject the systematic integration of faith and learning. Moreover, faculty between the two camps, who nuance their position based on the type of course, appear to be in a distinct minority.⁵

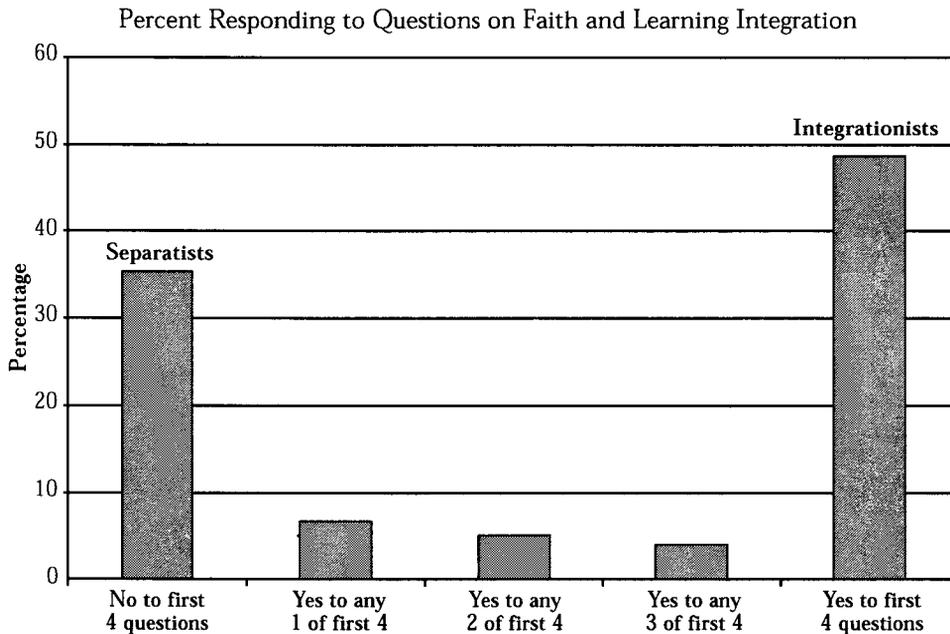
DESCRIBING THE TWO CAMPS

In order to describe the integrationists and separatists we first create two binary variables separatist (1=no to all four questions; 0=yes to one or more), and integrationist (1=yes to all four questions; 0=no to at least one question). We

⁴ A factor analysis of these responses showed that the first four possess a very high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =.953).

⁵ This holds true for all six schools, i.e., the "integrationist" and "separatist" camps are always larger than those responding somewhere between the two extremes.

FIGURE 1



examine the relationship between important covariates and the likelihood of classifying oneself as an integrationist or as a separatist. These covariates include the gender of the respondent, the academic rank of the respondent; whether or not the respondent has earned a degree from the institution; whether or not the respondent has the same religious affiliation as the institution.⁶ We also control for two covariates of the institution. First, we control for whether or not the institution is a liberal arts college. Second, we control for Brigham Young faculty who are both numerous and distinctive in our sample—numerous because of a large faculty, a high response rate, and a tendency to hold an extreme position—distinctive because of the unique nature of LDS higher education.⁷

Once missing values are excluded, the analysis has 1,703 valid cases. Of these, 36% are separatists, 48.5% are integrationists, while 16% are somewhere in between. Among those 1,703 faculty, about three quarters (76.6%) are male, most (90%) are at a Doctoral/Research university; three in four (76.6%) have the same religious affiliation as their current institution (e.g., a Catholic at Notre

⁶ In order to enhance anonymity, other faculty characteristics such as age and race were not asked on these surveys.

⁷ Almost all (98%) BYU faculty members are Mormon, and BYU faculty are 2.5 times more likely to have earned a degree at their school than are faculty members at other institutions.

TABLE 1

Logistic Regression Predictions of Separatist and Integrationist Positions on Faith and Learning (n=1703)

Variable	Separatist Odds Ratio	Integrationist Odds Ratio
Brigham Young University	.798 ^a	1.766*
Male	.710*	1.116
Same Religious Affiliation as Institution Where Employed	.432*	2.615*
Degree from Same School as Where Employed	0.941	1.195
Liberal Arts College	.546*	2.095*
Full Professor	0.894	1.235*
Intercept	0.533*	-1.401*
Model Chi Square	90.94*	158.28*

*p<.05

^ap<.10

Dame); almost half (48%) have a degree from the current institution; many (42%) are full professors, and almost half (47.3%) are at BYU.

Table 1 presents multivariate logistic regression analysis predicting the *ceteris paribus* probability that a respondent is a separatist on faith and learning. This model shows a number of important relationships. Female faculty members are more likely to be separatist than are male faculty members. The odds of a male faculty member being a separatist are 29% lower than the odds for a female faculty member being a separatist. Since traditional Catholic, Baptist, and LDS theology all ascribe distinct and non-leadership roles to females, it would not be surprising to find that female faculty are less likely than their male counterparts to incorporate theology into the curriculum.

Faculty members at doctoral universities are almost twice as likely to be a separatist as are those faculty members at liberal arts colleges. Stronger still is the effect of religious affiliation. Faculty members whose personal religious affiliations do not match the affiliation of their institution are more than twice as likely to be separatists as are faculty members whose affiliation matches the institution.

Table 1 also presents the results for whether or not the respondent is an integrationist. These results, to some extent, are complementary to those found for

the odds that one is a separatist. For example, faculty whose personal religious affiliation is the same as the institution's religious affiliation are 2.6 times more likely to be an integrationist, compared to faculty with other religious affiliations. In addition, faculty members at liberal arts colleges, in this case Georgetown and Samford, are twice as likely to report being an integrationist than are faculty at the doctoral granting universities in the sample. This distinction is predicted in the analysis of Jencks and Riesman (1968) and Marsden (1994) who observe the secular demands (diverse faculty and students, multiple goals, guild and professional standards, external funding) on research universities.

The odds that a full professor is an integrationist are 24% higher than the odds that a non-full professor is an integrationist. This suggests several possibilities. The most obvious is a generational cohort effect with older faculty more likely to embrace an integrationist position. Another possibility is that rather than age, it may be that the longer one stays at a religious institution, the more knowledgeable one is about how to incorporate religious views, or it may be that promotion is at least partially dependent upon a willingness to integrate faith and learning. These effects are difficult to separate statistically, and all may be operating simultaneously.

Unlike the model for separatists, gender has no effect on the probability that one is an integrationist. Females are more likely to be a separatist, but males are statistically no more likely than females to be an integrationist. Being a faculty member at BYU is an important predictor of being an integrationist, and not surprisingly, BYU faculty are less likely to be separatists. Having a degree from the same institution where one works has no net effect on the probability of being either a separatist or an integrationist.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Faculty at religious colleges and universities are likely to be in one of two camps concerning a key (arguably *the* key) issue facing faith-based higher education. At all six schools represented in our sample, the largest two groups of faculty were those who adopted a consistent separatist or integrationist position on faith and the core curriculum. The integrationist camp is more likely to predominate at liberal arts colleges or BYU and is more likely to be comprised of males, full professors, and faculty who share a denominational affiliation with their current institution. Conversely, the separatist camp is likely to be larger at research universities associated with the Baptist or Catholic denominations. In the separatist camp we are likely to find higher proportions of women, assistant professors, and faculty whose denomination is distinct from their current school.

The most powerful and perhaps the most controversial finding focuses on the match between the denominational choice of the faculty and the denominational heritage of the college or university. For example, based on our models, a male, full professor at Boston College who is Catholic has only a one-in-three chance

(.34) of being in the separatist camp. However, a male, full professor at Boston College who is *not* a Catholic has a slightly more than one-in-two probability (.54) of being in the separatist camp. There may be many sound reasons to hire faculty outside the denominational ties of the school (e.g., religious diversity, strong scholarship), but engendering support for a core curriculum that integrates faith and learning is not likely to be among them.

Since religious liberal arts colleges have different expectations than their research university counterparts, perhaps the least surprising finding is that faculty at liberal arts colleges are twice as likely to be in the strict integrationist camp. At research universities, faculty tend to see themselves and their colleagues as a company of scholars, committed to the discovery and dissemination of truth or knowledge, each doing their own work in their own specialized way (Jencks and Riesman 1968). Conversely, liberal arts faculty are heirs to the 19th century denominational college; they remain influenced by, and preservers of, the ideal of the unity of truth, a unity ultimately illumined by faith (Mannoia 2000).

Although it may not be surprising, one must note the remarkably distinctive characteristics of faculty at Brigham Young University. Even after controlling for background differences, faculty at BYU are more than twice as likely to be supportive of integrating faith and learning than are their counterparts at other religious colleges and universities. LDS faculty and the LDS approach to sponsoring higher education are quite distinct from the other schools represented in our sample. The degree to which distinctive LDS history and theology leads to distinctive Mormon social arrangements is well established in areas such as politics (Mazur 1999), parity (Merrill, Lyon, and Jensen 2003), family structure (Carroll, Linford, Holman, and Busby 2000), gender roles (Vance 2002), or physical health (Lyon, Gardner, and West 1980), and our surveys expand this distinctiveness into the provision of higher education.

These findings concerning the two camps of faculty opinion and the degree to which opinion is explained by factors such as the overlap between faculty denomination and institutional tradition are based on the largest number of surveys to ever consider the integration of faith and learning. However, the findings could be expanded and perhaps corrected with surveys of faculty at secular colleges and universities and by ethnographies that examine the syllabi and instruction methods of those faculty identified as integrationists or separatists.

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