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Experiences with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in Faculty Teaching Practices at Southern Catholic Colleges

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As special-mission institutions, Catholic higher education institutions pursue similar goals of American higher education to develop graduates who are civically engaged and ready to address contemporary challenges. However, these institutions are often challenged to integrate their religious mission within the classroom through faculty pedagogy, which buttresses academic freedom and student consumerism issues. This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Catholic university faculty members as they described their pedagogical experiences and Catholic identity perspectives. Findings from this study suggested a connection with Catholic identity, but that their relationship with institutional mission related to teaching was ambiguous. Participants had little professional development and called for their institutional leaders to better help them integrate Catholic mission and identity into their teaching approaches. Implications for practice include new ways of thinking to better support faculty teaching connection to institutional Catholic mission and identity.

Keywords: Catholicism, catholic social teaching, faculty, pedagogy, religion, faith, ex corde ecclesiae

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American Catholic higher education began as Georgetown College in 1780 and by 1850, there were 42 Catholic colleges (O'Brien, 2010). Their original mission was to prepare young men to become priests and promote the missionary activity of the Church, but this shifted in the later 19th century to include undergraduate education as their faculty focused on research during the era of "Germanification" in which colleges became universities (Leahy, 1991; Rittof, 2001). In 1887, Saint Louis University (SLU) offered the first 4-year traditional curriculum and then Pope Leo XIII authorized Cardinal James Gibbons Archbishop of Baltimore to establish the Catholic University of America (CUA) in 1887 (Rudolph, 1990). CUA and SLU became the first Catholic institutions to engage in scientific research and offer graduate degrees in theology and philosophy which evolved into centers for scholarship about integrating faith into teaching and learning (Hutchinson, 2001).

In the 20th century, Catholic higher education grew locally and was founded primarily to meet the needs of local congregations or dioceses, and drifted away from the *in loco parentis* supervision of undergraduate curriculum (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Catholic higher education has evolved into a system that is comprised of over 200 institutions which form The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) and 46 religious sponsoring congregations (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities [ACCU], 2019; Rizzi, 2019). Each of these institutions holds different missions or service orientations which vary by the founding clergy order. However, there was an attempt to unify their purpose by clarifying the mission and vision of American Catholic higher education.

This identity and mission were conceptualized in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in 1990 by Pope John Paul II through describing Catholic institutional mission as "Christian inspiration" and "research on human knowledge" to the university community (John Paul, p. 13). Catholic identity in higher education was described as, "fidelity to Christian message" and "service to others" (John Paul, 1990, p. 13). *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* further established specific recommendations for all academic community members to foster and respect Catholic identity (John Paul, 1990). In addition, Catholic universities were called to integrate "Catholic teaching and discipline in all university activities" (Alexander & Alexander, 2000, p.1). According to this document, Catholic universities should aim to keep the Church's teachings and Christ at the center of instruction through intellectual tradition and service to society (John Paul II, 1990). Efforts to align with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* have proved challenging for Catholic institutional leaders as external pressures have wrought

significant internal change to these institutions.

Catholic institutional leadership has shifted from clergy (priests, nuns, and sisters) to laity who are the ordinary members of church not in direct ministry who now comprise two-thirds of university presidents (Waggoner & Walker, 2018). These presidents and other institutional leaders face many challenges as threats to congruence with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and include student consumerism, emphasis on science and technology majors, and the professionalism of the humanities (Thelin, 2017). Changing student demographics, demand for online education, an increasing contingent faculty body, and reduced instructional resources are additional challenges (Thelin, 2017). Institutional leaders are uniquely challenged to sustain Catholic identity and mission in the face of these changes (Cordoba, 2017).

Critical scholars have suggested that Catholic higher education has been unresponsive to these challenges (Scanlan, 2008; Storz & Nestor, 2007). Keeping the Catholic academic tradition of commitment to the liberal arts and humanities sacrosanct is often juxtaposed to these changes in higher education. Faculty are frequently within the crossroads of these challenges. Catholic institutions remain rooted in their past, focused on centering faculty teaching across a solid comprehensive general education curriculum and theology.

Catholic institutions can benefit by understanding how institutional changes might impact faculty and how they may embrace new technologies or teaching methods such as flipped classrooms, blended instruction, and active learning strategies to adapt to a more diverse body of students in the context of changing higher education. These approaches are especially effective for engaging first-generation and students of color (Frederick, Sasso, & Maldonado, 2018). Furthermore, the existing research literature fails to explore the lived experiences of faculty participation in teaching within this context. To address this gap, this study explored how Catholic faculty members may integrate *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Catholic mission and identity into their teaching to promote student learning within the context of changing Catholic higher education.

Literature Review

College Identity & Teaching

Pope John Paul II authored *Ex Corde Ecclesiae (From the Heart of the Church)* in 1990. He charged that Catholic institutions should maintain their religious identity because they underwent a series of adaptations to broaden their purpose (John Paul II, 1990). Catholic universities have additional expectations imposed by their mission to teach

their discipline and Catholic dogma (John Paul II, 1990). Thus, Catholic higher education institutions struggle to balance tradition, identity, pedagogical strategies, and academic freedom (McQuillan, James, & Muldoon, 2018). However, critical scholars suggested that a transformation in Catholic higher education systems needed to take place in the 21st century (McQuillan et al., 2018) in which the influence of technology had to be considered (Beabout, 2012).

Catholic universities face the challenge of maintaining their Catholic identity and mission while offering competitive academic programs, yet they remain rooted in lecture format and memorization of knowledge (Ediger, 2001; Scanlan, 2008; Storz & Nestor, 2007). Previous research indicated that lecturing or testing are less effective for retaining knowledge as compared to active learning strategies (Cerbin, 2018; Schmidt, Wagener, Smeets, Keemink, & van der Molen , 2015; Stearns, 2017). Other new education models have been developed in face-to-face classrooms to increase student engagement and learning in the classroom which include hybrid or flipped formats or active and cooperative learning approaches to teaching (Wright, 2011).

Some Catholic institutions have integrated Catholic identity into teaching using Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a distinctive pedagogical approach native only to Catholic colleges (Krebbs, 2012). CST refers to, "social principles and moral teachings of the Church related to protecting human life and dignity and promoting social justice" (Eick & Ryan, 2014, p. 29). CST has evolved from seminal church dogma since the late 19th century, but was reconceptualized in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in which John Paull II expressed how the social message of the Church earns greater credibility when translated into actions. Over the last two decades, scholars have elucidated the role of CST in framing discussions about the role of Catholic institutions in the social, political, and economic affairs of the secular world (DeBerri, Hug, Henriot & Schultheis, 2003; Dorr, 1992; McCormick, 1999; O'Keefe, 1996, 1999, 2000; O'Keefe & Evans, 2004; O'Keefe & Murphy, 2000).

Training in the core values of CST allows faculty members to make connections between the university's commitment to social justice, the institution's founding vision and with Catholic tradition without regard to faculty's religious background. However, the greatest success of the programs is faculty integration of CST content in the design and delivery of their courses (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). CST has been successful in teacher preparation courses or in general education in which students interrogate social justice issues to include race, class, and gender (Eick & Ryan, 2014).

Although research identifies student resistance and struggles with CST (Chubbuck, 2007), Catholic institutions more recently have begun applying the principles of CST to inform better pedagogical approaches to communicate Catholic identity across their curriculum. It has become an increasingly distinctive approach at some Catholic institutions (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). Some colleges have engaged in specific trainings which have taught participants how to better apply CST to specific learning assessments and courses (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

Some institutions have used CST in faculty training or in orientations to socialize faculty into the Catholic mission of the institution and identity of the Church (Sullins, 2004). This allows faculty to make better connections to their academic community, which may provide more obvious connections to CST in their teaching (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). This strategy has been effective at DePaul (Whitney & Laboe, 2014) and St. Xavier universities (Sanders & Clough, 2011). Others have specific CST training or professional development such as at Villanova University or Cabrini University (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). These programs have successfully engaged faculty members with diverse religious affiliations in the tenets of CST (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

Catholic Mission

The mission of Catholic higher education as outlined in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is challenged by the diverse needs of the post-traditional, contemporary college student which may require new teaching models and support strategies (Frederick et al., 2018; Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). Given that Catholic faculty and staff are just as likely as non-Catholics to equally support diversity and inclusion on campus (Ferrari & Janulis, 2009), Penzenstadler (2000) argued that diversity is inseparable from the Catholic tradition and that fully embracing a diverse campus is the fulfillment of its mission. Addressing diversity matters is intimately connected to Catholic tradition, but actions to meet the needs of non-traditional college students have posed more significant threats to Catholic institution faculty members and leaders.

Boland (2000) predicted that Catholic education would struggle to adapt to 21st-century technology that would decenter teachings of the Church which are focused on humanizing spiritual beliefs, more students of color attending Catholic education, and different teaching strategies such as problem-solving-based learning. Boland (2000) suggested these traditions were rooted in thinking that will no longer serve the 21st-century learner and will need to rethink its approaches to adopt new instructional technologies to preserve Catholic mission.

Rizzi (2019) suggested that a more "personal" on-grounds student experience is a hallmark of Catholic higher education and Barbour, Siko, Beadle, and Bitgood (2019) posed that online environments may present moral ambiguities for Catholics which both are connected to mission as suggested by Eick and Ryan (2014). These attitudes and traditions of Catholicism may reduce the availability of classroom instructional technologies, or faculty might be hesitant to embrace new instructional approaches to online learning (Barbour et al., 2019; Boland, 2000). Other scholars have emphasized hiring based on the mission, by selecting faculty who understand and support the university's religious goals (Briel, 2012; Flanagan, 2010, Roche, 2017). They suggest faculty should use curricular and pedagogical practices anchored in Catholic tradition which focus on preparing students to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers with strong social and moral values (McQuillan et al., 2018). However, there is often a disconnect between Catholic mission, academic curriculum, and teaching (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017). O'Connell et al. (2012) presented the idea that the mission of Catholic education flows from its identity. Thus, it is important to look at the "who" and "why" (identity) to understand the "what" and the "how" (mission). Catholic colleges and universities derive their institutional identity from Jesus Christ, from the Gospels, and the teaching and traditions of the Church (O'Connell et al., 2012).

Similarly, other scholars have explored ways in which pedagogy connects to personal identity and institutional mission. Eifler and Landy (2014) examined how different disciplines meet Catholic institutional mission through various teaching pedagogies in which their students may find transcendence. For example, Eifer and Landy (2014) presented the idea of being a "detective of grace" by teaching through the lens of three C's: curiosity, conversion, and celebration (p. 25). Curiosity centers on the scholar's orientation to inquiry and discovery. Conversion centers on the transformational impact derived from the acquisition of new knowledge. Celebration refers to the distinctive joy that flows from discovery and from newly gained knowledge (Eifer & Landy, 2014). Also, Glanzer & Alleman (2019) specifically discussed how identity-informed teaching is a vocational responsibility in which they push against those who "restrain the influence of one's extra-professional identity" (p. 5). Utku (2020) suggested this approach helps to legitimize the inclusion of Christianity into identity-informed teaching which may allow faculty to be authentic in their own approaches to pedagogy.

The aforementioned research in this literature review suggests there are complex contextual challenges native to Catholic

higher education and that faculty experiences within it draw from a potential nexus of Catholic identity in teaching and institutional mission. Martin (2014) suggested a need to transform education through research about Catholic institutions (Martin, 2014). Thus, the interest in pursuing a study that stems from faculty members' lived experiences at Catholic universities, following Giorgi's phenomenological psychological method to analyze and describe the experiences of faculty members in Catholic universities (Giorgi, 2012). In this qualitative exploration, the study was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Catholic faculty members and to what extent do they describe integrating Catholic mission and identity into their teaching?

Methods

Research Design

The study was a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study using a semi-structured interview guide which places a strong emphasis on the words expressed by the participants and not on the interpretations of the researchers (Giorgi, 2012). This methodological approach allowed the researchers to understand how these perceptions and experiences relate to the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2012). The researchers interpreted data through the interpretive relativist ontology paradigm in which epistemology assumes that the researchers cannot separate themselves from what they know, and meaning is co-constructed (Patton, 2015).

Participants

As suggested by Sullins (2004), broad inclusion was established in which participants needed to be Catholic-identified and a full-time tenure-track faculty members. A chain-referral (snowball) sampling as outlined by Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) was used to recruit participants through email to construct an intentional purposive sample (n=6) at four Catholic universities in southern United States. There were 65 referrals and ten were selected who agreed to participate. However, only six were able to participate because of limited availability due to COVID-19 (see Table 1). Nevertheless, the depth and richness of the information still uncovered the phenomenon in the study (Mapp, 2008; Patton, 2015). All participants have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Religion	Ethnicity	Discipline	Rank	Teaching Years
Ashley	Female	Catholic	White	Education	Department Chair	5
Bob	Male	Catholic	White	Theology	Assistant Professor	33
Elizabeth	Female	Catholic	Latina	Science	Assistant Chair	20
Gary	Male	Catholic	Latino	Health Sciences	Associate Professor	25
Dianne	Female	Catholic	White	Education	Department Chair	9
Zachary	Male	Catholic	White	Theology	Associate Professor	11

Researcher Positionality

It is imperative that the researcher fully disclose any biases or perspectives (Patton, 2015). Both researchers are Latinx, Catholic, cisgender, heterosexual faculty at different institutions from working-class backgrounds. They collectively consider their dominant identities through intersecting identities of race, gender, social class, ableism, and acknowledge their privilege and power as well as the responsibility that comes with those identities to advocate for social justice. They recognize their respective positionalities, which may limit their perspectives which require continual reconstruction of new ways of considering Catholic identity and teaching. They realize they are responsible for communicating the values and research methods in this study of Catholic higher education. This is a form of cultural transmission that can bring striking—and welcome—changes as a result of a more nuanced understanding about the intellectual pursuits of Catholic faculty.

Data Collection

The researchers conducted open-ended, digital interviews with the six participants in this study using an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2015). This approach allowed the participants to tell their stories as they recalled those elements that were meaningful to them (Benner, 1994). The interview guide asked participants to describe their understanding and experiences about the implementation of pedagogical

practices in Catholic higher education classrooms while integrating mission, tradition, and heritage. Participants were provided with a standardized informed consent and selected a pseudonym to protect confidentiality and institutional affiliation. Participants agreed to video recording which lasted between 45 to 60 minutes each. All interviews were professionally transcribed to prepare for data analysis.

Trustworthiness strategies as suggested by Jones et al. (2014) were used to inform analysis and interpretations of transcript data. The researchers ensured trustworthiness through: (1) an external auditor was a retired university professor from a higher education/student affairs graduate program with *a priori* experience and knowledge about Catholic higher education; (2) a subject matter expert who was a current professor of higher education assisted in reviewing and questioning the main themes and questions in an attempt to clarify researcher bias; and (3) member checking using the interview transcripts after the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the descriptive psychological phenomenological method. This method was selected because it is appropriate for exploring psychological experiences (Giorgi, 2012) in college pedagogy with spirituality (Snipes & Manson, 2020) and helping professions (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér, 2019). Data analysis followed the five-step process which begins with bracketing of *a priori* knowledge and concludes with exploring significance and power of meaning units (Giorgi, 2012). Three levels of coding using interpretative phenomenological analysis in which more than 70 codes were collapsed into a final codebook of 30 codes using: (1) line-by-line open coding; (2) secondary coding used axial coding in which open codes are grouped into more abstract/complex categories; and (3) selective coding was used to collapse themes in which bracketing was utilized as a heuristic to structure coding (Patton, 2015).

Findings

Within the changing context of Catholic higher education, Catholic faculty members described nebulous ways in which they integrated mission and identity into their teaching. The participants revealed that faculty were committed to the Catholic institutional identity and mission, but described some ambiguity about how it connected to their teaching. Therefore, they conceptualized teaching and Catholic identity as contextually separate depending on the course or academic unit. They also struggled to teach in the context of Catholicism in which they

strongly identified the need for training or professional development opportunities.

Commitment to Catholic Identity

All the participants in this study expressed an understanding of their own Catholic identity and acknowledged it is connected in someway to their institutional mission. The participants shared that Catholic identity largely permeated the culture of their institution or was unintentionally communicated through symbolism or socialization with their peers.

Faculty expressed how certain symbols such as events at their institutions communicated Catholic identity and shared the expectation that they participate in such symbolic events as a "Community Day." The notion of Catholic identity was also deeply personal for the participants. Some faculty selected their institution intentionally because it was Catholic. Bob identified strongly with Catholic identity, which he described it as, "the joy of being Catholic has been fundamental to who I am."

They all were committed to their Catholic identity, but could not articulate how it connected to their teaching. Participants expressed that their teaching was not separate from Catholic identity and mission as they did not compartmentalize the classroom teaching space as separate from Catholicism. However, they distinguished secular and sacred concepts by course subject or administrative unit such as department, school, or college.

The participants suggested that intentional teaching of the Catholic tradition, mission, and identity happens mostly in theology or religion courses. They added context to the fact that many students take religion to meet the general education requirements, not because they had a legitimate interest in the content. Specifically, Elizabeth added, "…at least from what I teach, I don't really think that there is much more that can be done to increase the Catholic teachings in the classroom... But I don't feel that in the sciences there really is room for it."

The participants also conceptualized differences within departments or schools. They also noted differences between the universities, too. Faculty members in the social sciences perceived a clearer integration of the Catholic mission, tradition, and teachings in their disciplines as these offer avenues to discuss these themes openly. Faculty members in the science disciplines, conversely, felt that there was no room for intentional teaching of Catholic values in their curriculum. However, they agreed that these values are evident on campus. Gary expressed these nuances: "The integration of the Catholic mission varies between schools and within schools. It doesn't mean one school is more mission centered than others, it just

means that we all interact with the core commitments in different ways."

Other faculty felt that their university's general education program is rigorous and deeply anchored in Catholic tradition which Gary described as, "the way you relate to each other, to the students, to the faculty members, though not specifically stated from class to class." The faculty felt that traditional academic rigor made it easy to build on that foundation as students go through their specialized or major courses. They felt that since many students at the university come from parochial schools, or homeschooled backgrounds, they are comfortable with Catholic teaching being part of their daily classroom conversations; thus, it is easy to continue those conversations. Faculty clarified that it was organic, but was not intentional. Ashely added:

> I just feel such freedom and in our classrooms as the lesson evolves and the conversation with students. I just feel very comfortable integrating our faith and letting the students bring up the point of faith or how that looks in a classroom. I thoroughly enjoy teaching at [university]. I wouldn't teach anywhere else after this experience.

Zachary indicated that when students are practicing Catholics, it is sometimes harder to draw them in open conversations about their faith:

> At my current university, the student body is extremely engaged with their Catholic faith. They are actually much harder to engage in conversations about faith and to create a safe space for discussion. And I think it's because many of them are afraid to ask questions about their faith because they are concerned about how their classmates will view them.

Catholic teaching, tradition, and heritage was expressed, lived, and shared by all faculty members willingly and freely. Dianne shared that she participated in a mentor program and this existential conversation of "teaching while Catholic" was salient, but she was unable to find an answer. She states:

> What are some of the unique aspects or characteristics of teaching in a Catholic higher education institution? …Our Catholic identity is something that we need to be very intentional about asking "What are we doing as a university, as a whole, and in departments, that's really being reflective of that identity?"

They feel it is not just a matter of compliance, but rather an individual desire that is felt deeply and shared openly as part of the daily activities on campus. It was evident that faculty members understand and embrace the

rich tradition and mission of the Catholic Church even if not intentionally taught in the classrooms. Participants agreed that universities engage in the promotion of the teachings of the Church through activities within the educational community even if, on the daily workflow, there seems to be little interaction among the different schools and departments. This lack of collaboration and cooperation impacted the way faculty felt about advancing their teaching through professional development, despite their commitment to their Catholic identity.

Need for Professional Development

The faculty members working in Catholic universities faced the additional challenge of incorporating Catholic teaching, tradition, or heritage into their academic interactions with students. Only Ashley had any formal training in pedagogical methods when she joined the universities. They have all developed their own methodology based on experience, independent learning, and collaboration with other professors. Ashley exemplifies this experience in which she taught online and added, “It didn’t really happen at all with regard to integrating the faith. No training, no direction. The chair at the time kind of briefly discussed it, but there was no training.”

All the faculty members shared they participate in haphazard or ad-hoc workshops throughout the year that help them incorporate Catholic identity, mission, and teaching into their syllabi and classes as best as they can. The participants described this as a historical shift in professional development for Catholic teaching faculty in which he added with a degree of nostalgia. Bob summarized historical shift by stating:

> In the past, the university worked with Catholic theologians to train faculty, but this is no longer taking place even though it was quite successful. This was strongest probably fifteen to twenty years ago, and it required the investment of time and resources by the administration. There was also some engagement with faculty and instructional technology and curricular design. In my view, this is critical because faculty, when they look at other material, they sometimes ask the question, “How can I engage this in what I do in my discipline or subject matter?”

The faculty also described that some training is provided in various ways. However, it was competitive or inconsistent. Fellowships for select faculty were offered to help them connect to the scholarship of teaching Catholic identity or mission. Other examples provided was a “train the trainer” approach in which select faculty are provided funds to attend a

Catholic teaching conference and are supposed to transfer their knowledge to others. However, often there was little transfer of knowledge and accountability. Some departments had infrequent professional development workshops about Catholic teaching at faculty meetings or others held ad-hoc mandatory faculty development days, which occur before each semester based on a specific quality enhancement plan related to academic accreditation, but rarely about Catholicism. Overall, professional development was informal since it was often unavailable.

The faculty suggested that training should be part of their regular professional development programs. Participants shared that their lack of formal teaching training and continuing professional development was related to little leadership involvement at their institution to facilitate the integration of Catholic teaching. There were no additional funds provided, nor incentives to do so. Any professional development had to come out of their own pockets ultimately. All participants in the study added that they are only given funds when they present research or scholarship at a conference.

Elizabeth felt disappointed with university leaders as she mentioned: "Professional development is not spearheaded by any leaders and that is unfortunate." Faculty members felt leaders have the power to influence quality and innovation in Catholic universities through professional development, but were expository about this lack of progress. Gary was particularly critical about the pace of innovation in Catholic higher education, "The things we saw at the community college twenty years ago we're finally getting now." Zachary highlighted that Catholic schools are resistant to change and added, "Catholic universities are behind even Catholic high schools. Leaders can help by recognizing that every part of the student experience is part of the curriculum." The faculty did clarify that Catholicism is resistant to change and some faculty felt that professional development may "fall to deaf ears."

However, Diane clarified that ultimately because of academic freedom principles in higher education, it is a matter of personal discretion to integrate Catholic identity and mission:

> Administration can definitely lead and provide opportunities for people to consider their practices, but ultimately it is the professor's choice. If some people just don't feel that there is a problem or reason to change, they won't.

Participants in the study have a clear sense that there is a need for initial and continuous opportunities for faculty development to integrate Catholic identity and mission in their teaching. Some faculty members also felt

that Catholic universities in general, can do more to support faculty in their integration of Catholic mission and identity into their teaching.

Discussion

Through a small sample from four Catholic universities located in southern United States, two themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) commitment to Catholic identity and (2) need for professional development. These support two salient findings: (1) faculty openly shared their deep-rooted understanding of Catholic mission and identity and (2) faculty were looking towards their administrative leadership to facilitate increased professional development to better integrate these concepts.

The faculty had connection to working at these special-mission institutions; they understood how to integrate Catholic values at a personal level and saw this as linked to their work at their institutions. However, their Catholic identity was not necessarily connected to their course pedagogy. It was unclear how they can or need to integrate Catholic identity into their teaching as they saw it as a more individual, personal concept.

Catholic universities share in their identity, reflecting it in the interactions among the people in the educational community. These interactions determine the nature of the institution and the particular ways in which its members behave (O'Connell et al., 2012). Participants in the study felt it is not necessary to proclaim the mission, tradition, and teachings of the Catholic Church in all their classrooms, as these become evident in the daily interactions of the people who make up the educational community.

The findings from this study advance our current understanding of the experiences of Catholic faculty in which there was a clear need for professional development. There is no extant research that discusses their Catholic identity in teaching or professional development for faculty in Catholic higher education institutions. The findings highlight the dissatisfaction present among faculty members about the apparent lack of support and funding for professional development. Catholic higher education institutions expect their faculty members to readily grasp and integrate the Catholic identity into their teachings in all their interactions, yet little is invested in supporting this expectation. The researchers can suggest some implications for practice which can be suggested based on this specific finding of lack of professional development in connecting Catholic identity to teaching.

Although all faculty in this study were Catholic, these institutions cannot assume their faculty support their mission, or that non-Catholic faculty might be unfamiliar with

Catholic traditions (Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009). Therefore, both Catholics and non-Catholics would benefit from professional development facilitating the appreciation of the Catholic institutional mission. Rizzi (2019) suggested that professional development activities can garner support for the mission among all faculty, regardless of their beginning conceptualization of Catholicism. Given that Catholic higher education may have restricted budgets for professional development, previous results suggest that CST pedagogy to connect Catholic identity and teaching is efficacious and should be included in any professional development (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

Additionally, Catholic higher education must better communicate its own mission across institutions to clarify expectations for connecting Catholic identity to teaching. Other scholars have noted in inconsistencies in the ways in which Catholic institutions share their mission, particularly among administrative leaders or advancement professionals (Bonglia, 2010). They struggle to communicate in authentic ways, and instead use language that stakeholders want to hear which may muddle or diffuse Catholic mission and identity. Gambescia and Paolucci (2011) examined institutional websites and found this same issue of communication. Better communicating the Catholic identity and mission may help attract faculty candidates who self-identify with their religious orientation or the universal values of Catholicism.

Creating an internal pool of resources and a shared vision for professional development will also push Catholic higher education institutions to develop more innovative approaches for such pedagogy. This continuing education for faculty is needed, along with the consistent branding of institutional mission and values centered on Catholic identity. This unique identity positions Catholic higher education to highlight its distinctive features, resulting in a marketable value-added proposition for these institutions.

This exploratory study provided a nuanced understanding of how faculty conceptualize their teaching in the context of Catholic identity amidst a changing higher education landscape. However, there were several limitations within this study. The sample size of the study was small and was only comprised of “layperson” Catholic Latinx or White teaching faculty from various academic disciplines from the same region of the United States. Thus, the transferability of this study may only apply to these specific faculty and regional institutions. Additionally, those with a stronger religious orientation may have included more forethought into incorporating Catholic identify in their teaching. Future

studies should consist of larger, heterogeneous sample sizes with representation from Catholic ministry, a teaching order, or from non-Catholic faculty to garner a wider scope of perspectives and experiences.

Conclusion

This study highlighted that those with a Catholic orientation informally integrate their religious identity into their teaching. Faculty members lack professional development to improve their practice and connect it to Catholic identity better, suggesting that Catholic higher education has not adapted to the changing landscape of higher education, which demands new pedagogical approaches. Catholic higher education administrators can have a powerful impact on the development and implementation of training programs that will provide faculty members with innovative approaches to pedagogy. Future research should expand the boundaries regarding faculty professional development about identity and mission at Catholic institutions.

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