The Impact of Practical Theology on Faith-based Organizations (FBOs)

Faith and Organizations Project

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I. Sources of Attitudes toward Faith-based Organizations
   A. Our political views about the role of congregations and their responsibility—or not—for the wellbeing of members and citizens in need;
   B. Our professional and voluntary experiences with faith-based organization and congregations; and
   C. Our own personal beliefs and religious experiences.

II. Sources of Attitudes toward Faith-based Organizations
   A. Political views
   B. Professional and voluntary experiences
   C. Personal beliefs and religious experiences

III. What Phrases are Used?
   A. Faith-based organizations (FBOs)
   B. Faith community
   C. Practical theology

IV. What Do the Phrases Mean?
   A. Faith community: any religious community that supports a given faith-based organization or set of organizations.
   B. Practical theology: the formal and informal mechanisms a community uses to enact its theological teachings through its religious culture and structure. This includes both explicit use of faith such as quoting theological statements or scripture, religious symbols, and religious based practices associated with governance.
   C. Faith-based organizations: implies the organization is “based” on faith; faith that is tied to a specific religion or religious group/denomination; a set of beliefs, values, commitments, relationships, and/or practices derived from or driven by a religious or faith tradition/community.

V. Faith-based? The Foundation of Practical Theology
   A. Faith, or religion, plays a discernable role in shaping or influencing any aspect of an organization or program.
   B. Faith-driven beliefs, values, commitments, relationships, and/or practices of the organizations’ stakeholders and/or culture contribute to the design, development, support, and effectiveness of the organization.
   C. Faith can refer to identity, mission, goals, and policies.

VI. Practical Theology within Religious Groups: Philosophical/Theological Underpinnings
   A. Mainline Protestants (Chaves, Giesel, and Tsitsos, 2002, pp.122-123)
      They are more likely to:
      1. engage in and encourage activities that build connections between congregations and the world around them,
      2. engage in social services, with other congregations across traditional religious boundaries, and
      3. open their buildings to community groups.
4. They are more likely than congregations in other traditions to act as stewards of civil society rather than as one component of civil society.

5. Serving others is an act of obedience to God. 

B. Theological emphasis on solidarity with the poor often leads with joining others in service and advocacy across denominational or interfaith lines.

VII. **Evangelicals**

A. They are divided in their approach to improving social conditions: some believe that all efforts at reforming a “wrecked vessel” are futile, and humanity’s only hope is for the work to come; others believe that God has entrusted Christians with stewarding God’s human and natural creation until the King’s return.

B. Wide strategies abound for achieving the goal of leading others to conversion or personal salvation.

1. Some view social service as a distraction or as a means to achieving their goal;

2. Others seek a “holistic” approach, while pursuing evangelism and social action as equally valid, scripturally-based practices;

3. Individualism emphasizes local autonomy over vertical linkages.

4. They form many organizations, but belong to few umbrella institutions compared to other religious traditions.

5. They are less inclined to join interfaith service networks, although evangelical megachurches have extensive outreach through multi-national organizations such as Compassion, World Relief, and World Vision.

VIII. **Catholics**

A. Original goal – salvation of souls, with meeting peoples’ actual needs as secondary.

B. Current practices—Catholic social service organizations have developed into highly professional services. Example: Catholic Charities—receives over 65% of their funding from government.

C. Since Pope Leo XIII, Catholics focus on the needs of the poor and economic and social justice.

IX. **Quakers**

A. Their belief that “there is that of God in everyone” leads to their work with those who are marginalized, in particular.

B. This core value has led to activities focused on peace and non-violence that led to early activism in the abolition of slavery, promotion of civil rights and full social and political inclusion for former slaves, native populations, the poor, women, and immigrants.

C. They are directed to be politically active to try and transform the world to a place that is oriented towards greater peace and justice.

D. They are called to faith, commitment to equality, respecting the beliefs, values, and life-ways of all people, and a central value of living in peace and creating a peaceful world. An example of peace and justice efforts is the AFSC, the American Friends Service Committee.

E. Practical theology of integrity for them is embedded in the practice of corporate discernment in worship, decision-making is consensus-based, and all agree on the common “sense of the meeting.”

F. Their sense of practical theology has led to open and honest business practices, with an emphasis on clear financial statements and plain dealing.

X. **Jews**

A. Judaism is both a religion and an ethnic group.
B. The community is defined as Jews who actively practice their religion and cultural Jews who share values and Jewish identity, but are not religious.
C. Anyone born of a Jewish mother is Jewish.
D. Jewish theology is based in the teachings from the Torah and the Talmud—aims at support for those in need, charity, and justice.
E. Justice and charity are merged in dual concepts.
F. Three key concepts on social welfare: tikkun olam (to heal the world), chesed (loving kindness), and tsedakah (more accurately combines charity, justice, and righteous duty).
G. Most of their institutions were originally designed to serve Jews; now they also serve the wider community.
H. The highest blessings are to provide quality supports that will help persons in need so that they can become contributing members of society.
I. Many Jewish organizations receive significant government funding because they provide a wide variety of social services to the general population with specific needs.

XI. **African Americans**
A. African American churches have been the centerpiece of African American culture.
B. Major focus—social reform, alongside evangelism and spiritual discipleship.
C. Theology varies from church to church, pastor to pastor.
D. Polity differs across denominations. Examples: AME appoints pastors; National Baptist churches select their own pastors.

XII. **Embedded vs. Explicit Practical Theology**
A. **Embedded theology**—refers to unstated values and/or expressions that may not be vocally articulated, but define the particular faith community.
B. The research study revealed:
   1. significant differences in the ways various faiths used God language and included faith-based messages in their programming;
   2. suggested that organizations could strongly rely on their faith traditions without exhibiting any of the open expressions of faith that most typologies used to identify an organization as faith-based;
   3. suggested that those religious traditions that strongly emphasize religious tolerance and a positive appreciation for diversity tend to embed their religious commitments more implicitly within their service organizations, rather than making those commitments explicit.

XIII. **Practical Theology – Examples**
A. **Mainline Protestantism**
   1. Religious culture is embedded in the governance and service structures
   2. Individual congregations appoint board members
   3. Heavy reliance on volunteers
   4. In-kind or individual donations are solicited through congregations
   5. Generally, volunteers are expected to conform to the professional norms of social work and not seek to impinge their beliefs upon the clients.
B. **Evangelicals**
   1. A particular God language may be known to those “insiders” but is not necessarily understood by those outside this community. Example—”I have been saved and I feel led to fulfill his will to bring others to Christ. Do you know the Lord?”
   2. Some organizations associated with the Evangelical community share the same language and practices.
3. Personal relationships—one factor why they are more likely hire people of the same faith, and may be less likely to have professional staff.

C. Quakers
1. People who join and become active in the Quaker community are socialized into behavioral standards.
2. Patience—waiting in silence for divine messages.
3. The culture of peace and non-violence sometimes leads to difficulties in resolving conflicts.
4. Encourage the participation of everyone.
5. Decision-making—sit in silence until they come to a “sense of Meeting.”

D. Catholics
1. Vary widely in how theology and values are embedded.
2. Difference in schools and hospitals. Schools are overtly Catholic whereas hospitals serve a primarily non-Catholic clientele are generally less overtly Catholic.
3. Second Vatican Council—encouraged Catholic organizations not to advertise their Catholicity very strongly.
4. Boards of Catholic organizations tend to be heavily Catholic, influencing decision making.
5. Catholic organizations are highly professionalized, with the majority of staff who may not be Catholic and/or religious.

E. Jews
1. Expectations—community-wide support and decision-making practices based on research, planning, and good governance.
2. There is an assumed familiarity and connectedness between and within organizations.
3. Strong embedded values that Jewish agencies should provide a Jewish presence to the wider community, to heal the world.
4. There is a sense of cultural immersion that takes place in the Jewish community and comes to define being a Jew.

F. African Americans
1. Driven by expressed theology and embedded values.
2. Unwritten behavioral code—influences the actions and behaviors of people attending an African American church.
3. This unwritten behavioral code sometimes extends to the language and practices found in African American organizations as well.
4. African American churches frequently develop their own organizations.
5. African American pastors maintain oversight.
6. The staff of these organizations are more likely to be from the founding African American church.
7. Many of the embedded values and theology in the faith community are clearly present in the service organizations. Example—reverence for the Pastor that is often present in the faith community is often present in African American service organizations.

XIV. Conclusion
A. Practical theology
1. Directs the faith community as it provides services.
2. Directs how a particular faith group decides to develop outreach services.
3. Informs strategies for maintaining connections, guiding and supporting non-profits formed by faith communities to provide education, social services, health services, and community development.

B. The “faith” in faith-based usually refers to religious faith, or to faith that is specific to a particular type of religious or faith community.

C. The practical theology of “faith” influences the practices of faith-based organizations and faith communities: mission; policies; boards of directors; governance; budgeting and finances; types of volunteers recruited; reason for existence; identity; use of God language; and fund-raising.