Article

"Client Transformation": Spiritual and Non-Spiritual Outcomes for Social Service Recipients of Evangelical Faith-Based Organisations

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Abstract: This brief paper outlines the various ways that Canadian Evangelical faith-based organisations in Southern Ontario effect "client transformation". Data from qualitative interviews, focus groups, and surveys administered to clients and providers in faith-based organizations yielded two types of outcomes—spiritual and non-spiritual. Regarding the latter, I suggest two sub-types of non-spiritual outcomes: (a) socio-behavioural and (b) psycho-affective changes. I also suggest three major types of spiritual outcomes: (a) growing in Christianity, (b) warming to Christianity, and (c) accepting Christianity. I conclude with a discussion about implications and limitations of the study for the scholarship on faith-based organizations.

Keywords: faith-based organizations; social services

1. Introduction

In previous work, myself and a colleague presented data from a mixed methods study that suggested Evangelical faith-based organisations held the Great Commission, a biblical injunction to bring non-Christians to Christ, as a de facto institutional policy (Gokani and Caragata 2020). While we discussed how this elevation of a biblical mandate in organisations with an otherwise secular mandate seemed to be done with a desire to avoid coercion (Gokani and Caragata 2020), and subsequently presented data on what these non-coercive or "nonviolent" methods looked like (Gokani and Caragata 2021), here, I present data on the *outcomes* of that work by Canadian faith-based organizations. In other words, I show what happened in the lives of clients who visited these Evangelical faith-based organisations for social services. I begin with a literature review in which I briefly touch upon a few areas relevant to understanding the contents of this paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Great Commission and Faith-Based Organizations

Assuming the reader has not read Gokani and Caragata (2020) or is not familiar with evangelical theology, I should first explain the Great Commission. The Great Commission is a Biblical injunction, usually one that cites specific passages in Matthew and Luke, which requires Christians to bring non-Christians to Christ. This injunction constitutes not only a belief or tenet of evangelical faith but also a practice, which is usually referred to as evangelism. Both religious and non-religious books and studies have found or asserted the importance of evangelism and the Great Commission to evangelical faith (e.g., Brouwer et al. 1996; Smietana 2015, add more). It is, therefore, well established that for evangelical Christians—those who typically assert the Great Commission as an important theological element—conveying and communicating the veracity and unique value of the evangelical message to non-Christians and non-evangelicals is a foundational, almost non-negotiable, element of faith—a "live-saving issue", as it were (Gokani and Caragata 2020, p. 406).

In two papers, I discussed the implications of this belief for social services. In Gokani and Caragata (2020), my colleague and I discussed how the Great Commission functioned

in FBOs in Southern Ontario as a de facto social policy. This meant that employees and volunteers of these FBOs overwhelmingly tended to adhere to the belief and implemented into their practice the Great Commission, but they did this without any formalization—hence de facto. In that same paper, we discussed how this inclination toward evangelism was accompanied by an acute awareness of the past issues related to coercive evangelism; the service administrators largely attempted to fulfill their personal and professional commitment to the Great Commission by avoiding coercion. In the second paper with the same colleague, we presented information on how they did this, through "non-violent evangelism", raising the necessary caveats toward the end (Gokani and Caragata 2021).

Our work was, at the time, and remains today, as far as I know, the first and only to directly study the issues of evangelism in faith-based organizations that provide social services in Canada. In fact, the body of work looking at the problem across the globe is rather sparse. While there is set of studies that comment on evangelism in faith-based organizations, particularly after the passing of the Charitable Choice provision in the United States (e.g., Cnaan and Boddie 2002), this set of studies, with some exceptions (e.g., Unruh and Sider 2005), avoids a direct approach to understanding evangelism and faith-based organizations. Studies within this set often rather opt to issue a warning about the intersection of faith and social service or to show some evidence that there might be some benefits to this pairing (e.g., Cnaan and Boddie 2002).

The Great Commission is good context, but this paper is ultimately about the outcomes for clients of evangelical faith-based organisations. Consequently, I am going to touch on two elements briefly before getting to the methodology and findings. First, I am going to comment on the spiritual outcomes, which I take here to mean any changes in a person's religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. Second, I am going to comment on the non-spiritual outcomes, which I take here to mean any changes in a person's life that are not related to their religious or spiritual practice but stem from them. This review will not be exhaustive but rather is intended to provide the reader with a general impression sufficient to contextualize the data I present.

2.2. Spiritual Outcomes of Social Services

Perhaps since William James's classic study of religious experience, the idea of the penultimate spiritual outcome, of "conversion", has been a focal point of social sciences research. The opening lines of his chapter on conversion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* give us a couple of important details:

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about (James 1902, p. 189)

The details of note here are that (a) there are multiple ways spiritual outcomes can be understood ("converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace", etc.), (b) that the outcomes can occur gradually or suddenly, and (c) that they have impacts that go beyond religious or spiritual practice.

One of the domains where we see one or more of these elements described by James is in the social science literature on faith-based organizations. Again, there is not much data here, but there is still some indication that faith-based organizations foster spiritual outcomes in their clients. In the US, for instance, DeHart's (2010) study on the collaboration between victim services and local churches raised concerns among some people that the churches involved were leveraging the partnership with victim services to foster spiritual participation and ultimately conversion among clients. Similarly, the observation that FBOs might foster spiritual and religious changes in people has been made in the US (e.g., Sager 2011; Sherr et al. 2009), Canada (e.g., Gokani and Caragata 2021; Janzen et al. 2012), and

internationally (e.g., Pelkmans 2009; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011). In some cases, such as Sager's (2011) brief comment on her study and Sherr et al.'s (2009) work, the notion of an FBO fostering spiritual changes in clients is raised alongside concerns about "proselytism", autonomy, and ethics; in other cases, such as Janzen et al. (2012), a study done in partnership with a faith-based organization and a Christian college, such considerations are minimal if present at all.

Thus, there are two crucial distinctions to be made here. First, the academic literature on spiritual outcomes of social services, even though small in size, contains a range of voices, from the secular to the religious. An example of the latter is Unruh and Sider's (2005) book-length study of the work of congregations in the United States. Sider is well-regarded as an evangelical scholar in the United States and Canada, having founded the Christians (formerly Evangelicals) for Social Change think tank, which identifies itself as a "group of scholar-activists, stirring the imagination for a fuller expression of Christian faithfulness and a more just society (Christians for Social Action 2021). An example of the former is Rebecca Sager's (2011) note in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* In between, perhaps, are people like Michael Sherr and his colleagues at Baylor, who take a skeptical and scientific approach from within a Christian institution. This distinction is important to make for obvious reasons: one's identity markers, whether "scientist", "Christian", or Christian "scholar-activist", helps foster one's perspectives. In the case of the truly devout or "scholar activist", such an identity indicates skin in the game.

This skin in the game, so to speak, is made more apparent and significant when we consider the second important distinction, which is the difference between academic scholarship and the confessional literature within evangelical circles; more specifically, that confessional literature tells us more about the very congregations, churches, and FBOs that might seek to, incidentally or intentionally, foster spiritual outcomes in their clients.

In Gokani and Caragata (2020), I delved deeper into some of this literature in order to give the uninitiated reader some context about what this means. Here I will just make a few summarising points. First, the confessional literature refers to the testimonies of believing Christians (mostly identifying as evangelicals); this includes pastors and believers. Second, this literature advocates for active efforts to change the faith of members of society, which is consistent with the Great Commission. One of the ways this change is fostered, of course, is through social ministry—which means, effectively, social work.

In other words, spiritual outcomes in clients—i.e., whether or not they change or shift their spiritual beliefs and practices—does not occur in a socio-political vacuum. Many churches and FBOs presumably *want* to make those changes, and they believe that making those changes are good for their clients, not only because of the spiritual implications, but also because of the non-spiritual implications.

2.3. Non-Spiritual Outcomes of Social Services

A swath of the literature also discusses the potentially positive impact of religion and spirituality on non-spiritual outcomes. In fact, if we look again at the chapter on conversion in James (1902), we notice a number of case studies of people whose spiritual conversion led to changes in the way they led their lives. In the opening page, again, James (1902) gives a relevant and telling example:

> Previous to this time I was very selfish and self-righteous; but now I desired the welfare of all mankind, and could with a feeling heart forgive my worst enemies, and I felt as if I should be willing to bear the scoffs and sneers of any person, and suffer anything for His sake, if I could be the means in the hands of God, of the conversion of one soul.

The body of literature in the social sciences that tracks such nonspiritual outcomes of some element of faith is actually larger than the previous one tracking spiritual changes, perhaps because it is not as fraught with issues related to proselytism and client autonomy.

In the FBO literature, for instance, there are plenty of examples of addiction treatment programs that have an element of faith. These programs sometimes show positive outcomes

in addictions (e.g., Hodge 2000; Hodge and Pittman 2003; Hansen 2004). Of course, the most salient example of this kind of non-spiritual outcome of an otherwise spiritual program in popular culture is Alcoholics Anonymous, and now Narcotics Anonymous, where belief in a higher power is used as an anchor to recovery from addictions—it is the first step. A derivation of AA/NA discussed in a Canadian study of FBOs, called "Freedom Sessions", is an evangelical version of the 12-step programs (Janzen 2011). As a "divine anointing" of the conventional 12-step programs, almost all of the 12 steps in Freedom Sessions are explicitly Christian. Step 2 states that "through personal relationship Jesus Christ, we can be healed [of addiction]". Step 3 states that a participant made "a conscious decision to turn our lives, our pain and our will over to the care of God and the leadership of Jesus Christ" (12 Steps of Freedom Session 2017).

There are plenty of other examples of faith-based organisations leveraging faith to foster positive outcomes in the lives of their clients. These examples are too numerous to review here but include several domains, such as immigration settlement in Canada (Janzen et al. 2012; Reimer et al. 2016); work and workfare programs in the US (e.g., Hodge and Pittman 2003; Lockhart 2003); and social and educational development internationally (e.g., Nishimuko 2008). Of course, it is important to note that these positive outcomes are sometimes accompanied by what critical observers have noted are more problematic issues, for instance, using one's development position to evangelise children of the recipients of that development aid (e.g., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011; Kraft 2015). This is, more or less, the same spirit in which people have commented on the problem inherent to changing people's spiritual or religious beliefs and practices.

What I am discussing here is just the literature on faith-based organisation, the most germane area of the broader scholarship given that my study consists of speaking to members of faith-based organizations. There is a much larger, more general body of literature on the benefits of religious and spiritual belief and practice, i.e., the benefits of belief or practice and not the benefits of belief or practice stemming from involvement with an FBO. This includes numerous studies on the benefits of religious or spiritual practice for mental health (e.g., Hodge et al. 2007; Oman and Thoresen 2005; Weber and Pargament 2014); physical health (e.g., Powell et al. 2003; Litalien et al. 2021), longevity (McCullough et al. 2000; Hummer et al. 1999, p. 277), and a number of other, often smaller studies that show more specific benefits. For instance, religious belief and practice as a protective factor against the negative effects of community violence (e.g., Jocson et al. 2018).

This literature has led to several calls for greater inclusion of religion and/or spirituality in professional fields, such as social work (e.g., Cnaan et al. 1999) and medicine (e.g., Balboni and Balboni 2020).

Taken together, it seems quite clear that spiritual belief and practice can and do foster non-spiritual outcomes in adherents, even those that do not experience the full scale "transformation" indicated in James and described by many in the evangelical confessional literature.

There is one last point I want to discuss before moving on to the methodology of the current study; it is a small but important point, and that is, apart from the academic literature pointing to the benefits of religion and spirituality to non-spiritual outcomes in a person's life, there is a large confessional literature full of "testimony" by Christians of the way that their faith helped them recover from problems. There are plenty of examples, but let me share one from popular culture that fits well with the modernized look of Christian culture as hip and edgy. It is the story of a man from a metal band, one with a reputation for being particular lydark. Brian "Head" Welsh, a guitarist in the band Korn, became a Christian, claiming Jesus was the reason he was finally able to stop drinking and abusing drugs, particularly methamphetamines. The subject of his 2007 autobiographical book, *Save Me From Myself*, its revised young adult version, *Washed by Blood*, and a recent documentary called *Loud Krazy Love* on how Welch's conversion positively affected his life and fatherhood, Welch's testimony is but one of thousands that demonstrates the way that

religious and spiritual beliefs seem to have positive non-spiritual outcomes in the lives of the people who hold those beliefs.

3. Methodology

The data presented are part of a larger study with multiple research questions. The research question that I am reporting on here is: What are the outcomes of faith-sharing in evangelical social service settings in Canada? In other words, I was looking to study more directly what was implied in some of the Canadian literature and sparsely studied in the American literature.

To answer this research question, I relied on a descriptive or observational research methodology, meaning I attempted to describe or observe what happened in the lives of clients when they visited evangelical FBOs that provided them social services. The sample of organizations here was retrieved from a list of churches and organizations on the website of an evangelical ecumenical organization. For those inclined to epistemological issues, the observational or descriptive methodology is more or less objectivist, which means there is an objective social reality that exists outside of the observer's subjective experience and that this observer, meaning me, can meaningfully describe and accurately capture elements of that social reality for others to observe. Consequently, there is space for a multitude of methods, so long as they facilitate observation or description.

3.1. Research Design

In the larger study, I adopted a mixed-methods research design, consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods, specifically the "Convergent Triangulation Design" discussed by John Creswell (Creswell 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). This research design was conceived as a way to allow researchers studying more complicated topics to think about how they might collect data from multiple sources that might all "triangulate" to form the answer to their research question. Studying FBOs is one such complicated endeavour and so I used multiple methods of data collection to ensure that I could hedge against the weaknesses inherent to using a single method.

3.2. Methods of Data Collection

There are five methods of data collection and thus five sources of data in the original study. I report on three here. They are (a) a survey that was administered to service providers, (b) interviews with service providers and clients of the FBOs, and (c) focus groups with clients. Interviews and focus groups were what one might expect, but the survey requires some further explanation. Surveys consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions but relied more heavily on the former. They were intended primarily to give a broader picture of the topic. Certain questions in the survey were adopted or adapted from Ebaugh et al. (2006); while they were used by Ebaugh et al. (2006) to measure either staff, service, or organisational religiosity, the content of some of the questions suggest these items can be used to measure spiritual outcomes.

3.3. Participants

In total, there were 6 focus groups, 23 interviews, and 29 surveys. With regard to the focus groups, there were five with clients totaling 18 and 1 with service providers totaling three. This means I spoke to 44 people via an interview or focus group and received anonymous responses to the survey from another 29 people. The survey was distributed to the FBOs and there was no way for me to track who filled them out. Therefore, there could have been duplication, i.e., someone who gave an interview might have also filled out the survey. However, this is consistent with the purpose of the design, namely, to use multiple methods to hone in on an answer to an otherwise difficult or delicate question.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analysed in a manner described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and labelled "Concurrent Data Analysis". This term basically means I analysed the qualitative and quantitative data separately. To analyse the quantitative data, I used SPSS and, given that I did not run any inferential tests, I used the basic descriptive statistics function to give me the mean and standard deviation. To analyse the qualitative data, I used NVivo and relied on Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, which they call "Thematic". This mode of analysis is the most simple and straightforward. It is a systematic way of going from the raw data to generated codes to generates themes.

To go back to the Concurrent Data Analysis, once I had themes and statistics, I followed the next step described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), which was to integrate the two data sets. There are two ways they recommend that this can be done, and both are intuitively sensible. The first way was to use the quantitative data as a primary indicator of what the answer to the research question might be and then supplement that with the qualitative data. I used the second way, which inverts the two—I used the qualitative data as the primary indicator and then used the quantitative data to supplement the qualitative data. The reason I did this is quite simple: I had far more interviews and focus groups, in terms of minutes recorded, raw data, and participants, than I did completed surveys.

4. Findings

My analysis of the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups and the data from the surveys yielded two broad themes, namely that most participants experienced (a) spiritual outcomes and (b) non-spiritual outcomes. Below, I present both of these broad themes along with sub-themes.

4.1. Most Clients Experience Some Form of Positive Spiritual Outcome

In total, 40 coded instances in the qualitative data suggest that some type of spiritual outcome occurred for most clients of the FBOs in question. A good portion of these 40 codes refer to general outcomes, but my analysis suggests that there might be three sub-themes or types of outcomes. Apropos of James's implied spectrum of spiritual "conversion", these three represent a gradation of change starting from the first, which I term "strengthening faith".

Strengthening Existing Faith. This refers to those clients who had already been practising Christians before they came to the FBO and who found that the FBO "strengthened" their faith while there. For instance, one of the clients of a rather devout organisation, who was said to be "waving the banner of the [faith] in a lowkey way" (C7C6) through helping out non-religious tenants of his building, came to the organisation with his faith and claimed one of the benefits was the continual strengthening of the faith: "It hasn't changed me. My faith has always been strong. I'm not changed. It's just getting stronger. And I want more people around me that are of the same faith, you know? You know, I wanna be around these people" (C7C3). At least two participants in another focus group at a rather large organisation were moderately practising Catholics whose faith in "God" became stronger as they came to the organisation (C8C2, C8C3). Another focus group consisted of three participants who had accepted Christ prior to coming to the programme and had stated that the programme helped them "dig deeper into my faith . . . and grow my relationship [with Christ]" and helped facilitate Bible reading and knowledge acquisition, leading to a feeling that "I almost feel *hungry*. Like I wanna find out more . . . I have that thirst to gain more knowledge" (C7C7). To these three participants, I asked, "So is it fair to say that the programme has helped you grow in your faith" to which all three agreed with "Absolutely", "Yes", and "100%" (C7C7, C7C8, C7C9).

However, the vast majority of participants, it would seem, are not people of faith,[1] or "unchurched", as one participant said (C17S1). They may be nominally Christian, have walked away from the faith in some way, have become atheist or agnostic, or be practitioners of another faith, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, First Nations spirituality,

and Wicca. For these clients, the journey toward faith seems either to be a "warming to religion" or a more full-scale conversion, the second and third gradations of change along this spectrum.

Warming to Evangelical Christianity. Concerning the former, i.e., warming to religion, two gentlemen, for instance, warmed to evangelical faith despite being atheists. Of particular note here is the fact that one of these participants seems to have had a rather traumatic experience with Christianity in his past and prior to his visitations to the FBO was always doggedly anti-religion:

> I didn't really like the faith part in the beginning, but I do know that they're doing it out of caring. They're not doing it because like "We're right; you're wrong. We're tryna teach you" . . . .they *wanna* help you. The reason why they're preaching to us is because they believe that it will definitely help us. And I can't fault them for that. Like that's a great way of thinking, I think. And that's OK with me. Even though the religion, prior to coming here, I wouldn't be cool with it. Now, I'm like, "These are, these are good people . . . I was *so* negative before I got here. I was really, *really* hurt and traumatised by certain things religious people did and I thought all people were like that. All religious people were like that. When I came here, I was like, you know, it's different. These guys have their faith, they believe, they care, and I'm not just some object or nothing". (C7C2)

Others in the same focus group noted that through the examples set by people—clients and staff—faith "rubbed off on those without faith" (C7C6):

> C7C6: Believe it or not there's a division where some believe but some don't believe, but [the non-believers] they'll listen to it . . . [They'll] still engage in the conversation.
>
> C7C3: Yes. They start to show an interest. And they wonder why this guy is such a happy guy and how he can, you know, preach to others and teach and still have the faith even though he's teaching people that are ignorant.
>
> C7C6: The seeds are always being sown right.

The metaphor of the seed is one that comes up often and seems not only to be an outcome but an objective of many: One staff said, "All we can do is sow a seed, and it's up to that person and the Lord, what happens in that person's life" (C8S1). I should note that while these examples are more explicit in demonstrating people "warming to faith", there are several others in which the same process seems to occur but in less explicit ways; I will not present those here.

Full Conversion to Christianity. Concerning the "full conversion" to evangelical Christianity, the third gradation of spiritual outcome, there are a number of examples here, as well, but only in the form of anecdotes from staff. This includes conversions by Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, nominal Christians, and at least one indigenous man. They include both men and women and people who were from Canada and multiple other countries from which newcomers hail, including at least Mexico, India, and Mongolia.

Finally, to the extent that being part of a faith community indicates acceptance of the Gospel, the survey statement "staff and volunteers work to bring clients they serve into a faith community" yielded a high mean and thus supports the qualitative data that clients are experiencing spiritual outcomes (M = 3.91, SD = 1.00). Moreover, about 73% of respondents said they "often" or "always" sought to do so.

4.2. Most Clients Experience Positive Non-Spiritual Outcomes

Concerning the second broad theme, non-spiritual outcomes, I observed several instances of the effect of the FBOs' work on service-related outcomes that might otherwise be addressed through secular means. In other words, the faith embedded within these institutions seems to help with the material, this-worldly problems with which practitioners concern themselves.

Starting with this the survey, a few questions assessed the "effect" of faith on social service outcomes. The item "bringing people closer into the faith community helps them with the problems they face" yielded a very high mean (*M* = 4.50, *SD* = 0.58). The variability was also very low as 95% of respondents scored this item either with a 4 or 5 on the scale, indicating near consensus that faith works to help people with non-faith-related issues. Another more general item stated, "Faith based programming helps to address the social problems we encounter (e.g., homelessness, substance abuse, etc.)". This item also yielded a relatively high mean and low variability, as 85% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (*M* = 4.29, *SD* = 0.70). When asked, "To what extent do you feel the faith-based elements (e.g., prayer, Bible study, conversations about faith, attending religious services) improve or make worse the service you deliver?", 95% of respondents scored a 4 or 5, and the item overall had a very high mean (*M* = 4.55, *SD* = 0.58).

These quantitative data are supported with just over 50 codes from both clients and staff, strongly suggesting that FBOs, and their faith in particular, may in many cases be positively affecting clients. The questions on the interview and focus group guides which correspond to this theme were worded to refer to behaviour, thoughts, and emotions and so the findings reflect these three. Moreover, similar to the spectrum of spiritual "conversion" noted above, there is a spectrum ranging from the smallest ever change to a full life transformation, fitting of the phrase.

Behavioural Outcomes. With that said, here are two examples of the former, each of which reflects a similarly sizable change in the lives of two clients. For each client, faith had clearly positively shifted lifestyle. Both had been deeply involved in organised crime in the recent past, and these two passages indicate how faith drew them and kept them away from that lifestyle:

> I don't wanna go [back to that lifestyle], not just because I got baptised [but] because I just discovered this new world, you know. I've been here [in Canada for] 30 years and I probably only worked this last year and a half. [The new world means] working for a living, first, because before I was involved in everything that was no good-drugs, fraud, prostitutes, you know everything, theft, you name it. And I never did any serious time here. I've been lucky, or too good, or whatever, you know. But since last year when I got baptised I promised to God and to myself and I said you know what "I do not want that life". (C8C1)

The connection between faith and this positive outcome is rather clear toward the end. Here is the second participant with a rather similar story:

> I have learned how to deny my bad thoughts. So I learned self-control. For example, back home I know many people. They're doing bad stuff and I always try to be away from that, right ... and for me especially when I have some problems or somebody wants to [quarrel] I say "Oh this guy doesn't know"...Like I have friends and people and I can call them and do something, you know what I mean? Support! Support! But I think "I'm not alone man. I have God. I have faith. I can try to control myself"...[There's] internal warfare...If somebody offers me do some wrong thing, I say "No" because now I have faith. That's the important thing, I can say "No", "No", "No" to bad things. That's the simple/[R: Which you wouldn't do without faith?]. Yeah that's right. (C8C4)

These two are clear examples where faith specifically has significantly changed lives, and there are other examples of both direct changes and "reformed gangsters" in the raw data.

However, even when faith is not as directly related, a number of instances indicate that the FBO and its staff have helped clients develop socially, and thus change the way they behave in, feel, and think about the social world. One staff member, for instance, noted a conversation she overheard by a client, who, after coming to the programme as a shy, timid, and rather young lone mothers, began to set boundaries with an unknown

male, a new and important feat that was influenced by her commitment to a faith-infused programme which taught her to set such boundaries in a "Biblical" fashion:

> I heard her on the phone once, I guess it was somebody from her family, I think it was a boy [Hahaha]. Maybe, I don't know if it was her-I don't know who it was and she was saying "No, Wednesday mornings is for me. You do not call me. I will not deal with anything. I'm at [the programme]. This is a progamme I need to make my life better". (C7S2)

There are also several instances of youth whose behaviour changed to be more pro-social after coming to a faith-based programme—they became "better kids", much to delight of parents, noted one participant (C5S1). Another one boasted, "we've moved hundreds of homeless youth into viable lives" (C15S1), which consists of work, among other things. Similarly, a few adult participants at another organisation apparently said, "I can hold down a job now" (C9S1) or that they learned "the value of work" (C8S3) or some form of financial literacy (C7S2).

Regarding addictions, there were several claims by both staff and clients that addictions were treated both directly and indirectly by faith and the FBO's influence. This included extremely addictive drugs, such as crystal meth and heroin, as well as more common ones such as alcohol and, for at least one participant, food. One staff noted that they thought the people who hadn't "accepted Christ" were more likely to relapse while those who accept Christ "really take back their life and we don't see them anymore" (C8S3). There was one staff member who claimed to be able to heal physical wounds with prayer (C1S1).

Psycho-Affective Outcomes. In terms of the more psycho-affective changes, here is a powerful example of a disaffected client, leaning strongly toward atheism with clear anti-religious and anti-Christian streaks when they came to the programme, but changed in the way they viewed the social world; at least one other client, with a similar inclination for science over religion, agreed:

> C7C2: [Coming here] gave me faith, not necessarily in a religion or a deity; it gave me faith in people.
>
> C7C1: Yeah!
>
> C7C2: It gave me this return to like "Hey man, I have faith in you. I can trust you that you're gonna be this person. You're gonna be loving to me". And that was something that I didn't have.
>
> C7C1: Yeah, yeah, same here.
>
> C7C2: Like it's faith in *something*. Maybe not a deity, but it brought me-
>
> C7C1: Faith in that there are actually good people out there
>
> C7C2: Yeah. Yeah.
>
> C7C5: [inaudible] faith in people.

Again, a number of other instances of such "psycho-affective" changes exist, including increased confidence, lowered aggression, reduced anxiety, "faith" in people, increased optimism, reduced fear, reduced anger, an increase in valuing oneself, and, as illustrated by this next instance, a powerful one of a man who had been plagued by PTSD-like symptoms, infused with guilt over atrocities he'd committed during World War II, something akin to forgiveness. A staff told the story thus:

> This is gonna sound crazy and extreme but this is what [the client] told me. [He was] given orders in a tank and a number of people had-soldiers I imagined, enemy soldiers-had huddled into a church building and he was told to demolish the church building [inaudible]. So he did. Of course he did. Anyway, he told me, the number of decades his poor wife lived with this. In his sleep he'd be strangling her, in his sleep, like he would *literally* be strangling her thinking she

was the enemy. He was just *living* this horrific war and he was connecting the dots [about his life]: "The reason I'm trying to do all these good things is to try and make up for that horrible thing." All I said to him, Ravi, was . . . "I just wanna let you know, you're forgiven [there's a pause and then I ask "How did it impact him?"]. It changed his life! It was as simple as that. I prayed with him and assured him, "You know, what you've done has been paid for; it's covered. Jesus loves you. It's done. The past is literally [pause] past". (C4S1)

To summarise briefly, data from the survey, interviews, and focus groups suggest two types of outcomes——spiritual and non-spiritual—for clients of FBOs in my Canadian sample. Spiritual outcomes include strengthening of faith for those already practicing in some way, warming to evangelical Christianity for those outside the fold, and conversion in some cases. Nonspiritual outcomes included two broad categories, behavioural changes, where people changed the way they behaved as a result of the FBO's or faith's influence on their lives, and psycho-affective changes, where people changed the way they thought or felt about something as a result of the FBO's or faith's influence on their lives.

5. Discussion

In this discussion, I will consider a few things: (a) limitations of the study; (b) implications of the findings for future research; and (c) implications of the findings for social services.

5.1. Limitations of the Current Study

For this study, the main weakness stems from the fact that it is observational research but discusses outcomes, which implies causation. Obviously, there are plenty of confounds in a natural setting, and qualitative work or survey samples with a small *n* as I have used do not permit one to determine if, in this case, the outcome is in fact an outcome of any one thing. So, I can say here that these data *suggest* that there *may* be some spiritual *and* nonspiritual benefit to the work of faith-based organizations, but that statement is necessarily circumscribed by the limitations of observational research. Related to this point is that some of the observations made were anecdotal. For instance, many clients and staff told stories about themselves but also others. There is no way for me to verify that these stories were true. On the other hand, the rich detail of the descriptions by many participants lends credibility to the study's findings.

Another major limitation is that all of the interviews and focus groups were performed in a context with demand characteristics and social pressure—or at least the potential for such. Take, as an example, a focus group. Without knowing the social dynamics between, say, five clients of the FBO, I have no way to determine if there are power dynamics, if everyone is comfortable being candid, or if there is some social desirability bias influencing what people say. All of the interviews and focus groups took place on site, meaning they were done on the FBO's premises and at the discretion of the FBO's management. There was not always the level of privacy one might prefer. This means it is possible clients and staff both were influenced by the social environment. Of all of the participants, I had only one who was willing to take a more critical stance, and he did so with a nagging worry that his comments might negatively affect his standing and place in the FBO.

5.2. Implications for Social Services

Despite these caveats, it seems clear that there are implications of these findings for social services broadly speaking. I am going to comment on three of these and they are related clearly to the structure of the paper.

First, concerning the fact that FBOs might be fostering some form of spiritual outcome in clients, there are a few things that can be said. Obviously, from the vantage of the evangelical FBOs, fostering spiritual outcomes in clients is not a problem. In fact, it is likely not a problem for many, especially those who have some faith, or some faith in faith to paraphrase Daniel Dennett. However, there are other ways of considering the situation,

including in the vein of scholars like Michael Sherr or Rebecca Sager. Moreover, in Canada, a good portion of the work undertaken in social services is performed by professional social workers, who have a *Code of Ethics* and a document tracing out *Guidelines for Ethical Practice*; in both of these documents a social worker using a professional position to forward a personal religious belief, or to achieve a personal religious outcome, is a violation of professional conduct. Of course, most of the people in FBOs are not registered, professional social workers, but they do social work. Therefore, from a strictly formal standpoint, nothing is wrong as they are not bound by the *Code* or *Guidelines*, but from a theoretical standpoint, we must at least consider that the social work profession has some good reason to privilege values like client autonomy and self-determination over the personal objectives of the social worker. I have hinted at this in my previous papers and have not dealt with it in depth because it is a rather complicated issue that requires more space than is available in this journal article. The implication for social services is, thus, that there might be some overarching ethical or moral considerations when anyone in an FBO uses their position to foster spiritual change in clients, many of whom are vulnerable. Consider, for instance, a person who comes to a social service worker in a secular agency struggling with addiction. The person has lost their life almost completely to addiction. Is that person in any position to be able to experience anything akin to client autonomy or self-determination? Most would likely say no and therefore the social service worker is encouraged to manage the influence of their personal political, financial, religious, and other interests. This brings us to the second issue, which is quite complex, as well, and also controversial in the non-religious, non-evangelical arena.

That second point is simply that faith might actually be a way to address problems that would otherwise be difficult to address through other, more secular, means. Again, consider that person whose life was lost to addiction. Say a social service worker had two choices: preserve that person's autonomy by maintaining the appropriate boundaries or give that person a religious belief system that might engender the change we observed in the passage quoted by James. Which is the ethical choice, exactly? The Evangelical social service worker might absolutely support the second choice, but there are many who might be strongly opposed, and perhaps many who might find themselves in the middle somewhere. The point is that a study such as this, with clear examples of men who were criminals, in some cases violent criminals, who changed their lives because of their faith raises the question of whether or not society and the men in question, to say nothing of the people in their lives, are better off. Just so it is clear, in asking this question and writing in this way, I am not suggesting a position.

5.3. Implications for Research on FBOs

This brings us to the implications of this study's findings for research. First, and rather simply, this is, to my understanding, the first and only study to look at this question directly in Canada. Against the backdrop of the much larger US scholarship, it adds some more evidence to the proposition that FBOs might be doing some good for their clients, while also raising some concerns that such good things are not always come by through a clear, unproblematic path. Second, more research on this question of outcomes is needed because of ethical questions. While most of the research into FBOs so far has been observational—in fact, virtually all of it—there is a range between the more qualitatively heavy studies and the quantitatively heavy. Perhaps sliding further toward the quantitative would lend some more certainty to these issues.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   There are no consistent numbers here, but some say as much as 80% of their clientele are not Christian.

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