

Research Article

Pastoral Counseling for Congregants Experiencing Workplace Discrimination Because of Christian Faith

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Abstract: This conceptual research article examines pastoral counseling for Christian congregants who experience discrimination because of their faith in workplace settings. The problem addressed is not only the organizational injustice of religious discrimination but also its psychological, relational, and spiritual consequences for believers who must negotiate professional responsibilities, Christian identity, and institutional vulnerability. The study aims to construct a pastoral-counseling framework that is theologically grounded, trauma-informed, ethically cautious, and practically useful for churches without claiming empirical findings from fieldwork. Using an integrative literature-review design, the article synthesizes scholarship on workplace religious discrimination, religious identity at work, perceived discrimination and mental health, religious coping, spiritual struggle, trauma-informed care, and pastoral theology. The synthesis identifies three major arguments: workplace faith discrimination should be interpreted as identity-related and spiritual injury rather than merely interpersonal discomfort; pastoral counseling must combine safe presence, lament, theological reframing, assessment of religious coping, and referral when needed; and churches should help congregants move from passive endurance toward prudent agency, documentation, accommodation-seeking, reconciliation where possible, and advocacy where necessary. The article concludes that pastoral counseling can become a constructive bridge between care and justice when it resists both victim-blaming and triumphalist persecution narratives.

Keywords: Christian Faith; Congregational Care; Pastoral Counseling; Practical Theology; Religious Coping.

1. Introduction

Work is one of the most visible social locations in which persons negotiate identity, dignity, belonging, and moral agency. In contemporary organizations, employees are expected to perform not only tasks but also appropriate versions of the self: cooperative, flexible, productive, and aligned with the organization's culture. For Christian employees, faith may remain largely private. However, it can also become visible through worship obligations, prayer practices, ethical speech, conscience-based decisions, religious symbols, Christian vocabulary, participation in church activities, or refusal to engage in conduct they believe violates Christian conviction. This visibility can support moral integrity and vocational meaning, yet it may also expose workers to ridicule, exclusion, suspicion, or unequal treatment. The problem becomes acute when the employee is also a church member seeking pastoral help because the injury is rarely only administrative; it touches conscience, vocation, spiritual identity, and trust in God.

Workplace religious discrimination has been studied in organizational psychology, human resource management, law, and sociology, but pastoral counseling has not yet developed an equally focused response to congregants who suffer faith-related discrimination at work. Research on religious discrimination shows that the issue includes hiring bias, denial of accommodation, harassment, stereotyping, exclusion from informal networks, pressure to conceal faith, and negative interpretations of religious expression (Ghumman et al., 2013).

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Religious identity at work also involves identity salience, value tension, belonging, and well-being, so the problem cannot be reduced to private belief alone (Héliot et al., 2020). Interviews with religious and nonreligious employees indicate that Christian respondents often interpret workplace discrimination through moral stance, piety, and religious expression (Schneider et al., 2022). Broader discrimination research demonstrates that perceived discrimination is associated with poorer psychological well-being and harmful work outcomes, particularly when mistreatment becomes repeated, ambiguous, or normalized (Dhanani et al., 2018). When the protected identity is religious, the worker may experience a conflict between professional belonging and covenantal identity, making the pastoral dimension especially important.

The urgency of the topic is sharpened by two tendencies in public and ecclesial discourse. On one side, secular organizations may treat religion as a private preference rather than a deep identity, thereby underestimating the burden of concealment or accommodation denial. A systematic review of religion in the workplace describes religious identity as an underdeveloped yet consequential field, as it intersects with values, community, identity salience, and well-being (Héliot et al., 2020). On the other side, church discourse can sometimes interpret every professional conflict through a persecution frame. Such interpretation may comfort believers initially, but it can also discourage careful assessment, documentation, interpersonal wisdom, organizational procedure, and appropriate legal referral. A constructive pastoral approach must therefore avoid two errors: reducing faith discrimination to ordinary workplace stress and inflating every disagreement into spiritual warfare or martyrdom.

Previous studies provide strong foundations but leave a significant gap. Reviews of workplace religious discrimination have highlighted its legal, psychological, and organizational dimensions (Ghumman et al., 2013). Interview-based research has shown that Christian respondents may connect perceived discrimination with personal piety, moral stances, or religious expression. In contrast, other groups are more often stereotyped as religiously foreign (Schneider et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry indicates that religion can shape work intentions and daily conduct (Etherington, 2019). Research on religion and the work-life interface likewise shows that religion influences boundaries, time, family obligation, and moral meaning (Sav, 2019). However, these studies largely address organizational understanding rather than pastoral counseling practice. Pastoral-care literature offers resources for healing, narrative, lament, spiritual assessment, and contextual care. However, it often does not specify how counselors should address workplace discrimination grounded in the Christian faith (Doehring, 2015).

This article asks the following research question: How can pastoral counseling constructively support congregants who experience discrimination because of Christian faith in workplace settings without producing passivity, retaliation, legal naivete, or an uncritical persecution narrative? The article proposes an integrative framework in which pastoral counseling functions as a bridge between spiritual care and practical agency. Its contribution is threefold. First, it interprets workplace faith discrimination as a layered injury involving identity, relationships, psychological safety, and spiritual meaning. Second, it organizes pastoral counseling around safe presence, discernment, lament, religious coping, trauma-informed care, and referral. Third, it argues that constructive pastoral care should prepare congregants for wise action by fostering documentation, boundary-setting, accommodation-seeking, dialogue, HR procedures, professional ethics, and community support. The rest of the article reviews the relevant literature, explains the conceptual-integrative method, develops three analytical findings, compares the contribution with prior scholarship, and presents conclusions for church practice and future research.

2. Literature Review

The literature on workplace religious discrimination begins with the recognition that religion is not merely a belief system detached from daily practice. It can shape dress, diet, calendar, speech, moral boundaries, rituals, networks, and vocation. Workplace religious discrimination includes unfavorable treatment connected to religious belief or practice, including harassment and failure to accommodate (Ghumman et al., 2013). Accommodation decisions are rarely purely legal because they are influenced by managerial discretion, perceived sincerity, perceived cost, institutional culture, and informal relational judgments (Bader et al., 2013). Decision-making beyond formal legal obligation also shapes how organizations handle religious accommodation requests (Tabesh & Jolly, 2019). This matters for Christian congregants because the injury may occur not only through explicit anti-Christian statements but also through apparently neutral policies that make religious practice costly, hidden, or professionally risky.

A second stream of research concerns religious identity at work. A systematic review of 53 publications found that religious and occupational identities may create value congruence, identity tension, unmet expectations, and consequences for well-being (Héliot et al., 2020). Narrative inquiry shows that religious identity affects how workers interpret duties and relationships (Etherington, 2019). Religion can also influence the work-life interface by shaping time, family obligations, and moral decision-making (Sav, 2019). Comparative interview research expands this view by showing how different groups perceive workplace religious discrimination, including Christian employees who often connect discrimination to moral stances, personal piety, or public religious expression (Schneider et al., 2022). These findings suggest that pastoral counseling should not ask only, "What happened at work?" but also, "What aspect of Christian identity was threatened, silenced, distorted, or punished?"

The workplace mistreatment literature helps clarify the psychosocial effects of discrimination. Workplace discrimination is associated with negative job attitudes, well-being difficulties, and withdrawal-related outcomes (Dhanani et al., 2018). Perceived discrimination is linked to poorer psychological well-being in meta-analytic research (Schmitt et al., 2014). Perceived discrimination is also connected to mental and physical health risks (Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Subtle mistreatment matters as well. Workplace incivility may look mundane, but repeated rudeness, condescension, and ostracism can become a serious stressor (Cortina et al., 2017). Persistent hostile behavior predicts later mental health problems in bullying research (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015). Later reviews also emphasize the need to distinguish between what is known, what is unknown, and what is still underdeveloped in workplace bullying research (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Religious discrimination in the workplace often operates through precisely these low-visibility channels: jokes, exclusion, suspicion, mockery of prayer, social distancing after moral disagreement, or managerial skepticism toward religious accommodation.

Pastoral counseling brings a different but complementary lens. Howard Clinebell's pastoral-care tradition treats care as a ministry of healing and growth (Clinebell, 2011). Carrie Doehring frames pastoral care as a spiritually integrated practice that listens to lived theology, trauma, culture, and relational systems (Doehring, 2015). Emmanuel Lartey emphasizes intercultural pastoral care and warns counselors not to treat human experience as culturally neutral (Lartey, 2003). Richard Osmer's practical theological model—descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic—helps organize pastoral discernment, as counselors must observe the situation, interpret it through social and psychological knowledge, evaluate it theologically, and respond with wise action (Osmer, 2008). In this article, pastoral counseling is not reduced to private consolation. It is a disciplined ecclesial practice that listens, interprets, supports, confronts harmful patterns, and helps congregants act responsibly within complex institutions.

Religious coping research is central to the proposed framework. Kenneth Pargament's theory presents religion as a system of meaning in times of stress (Pargament, 1997). Later religious-coping research distinguishes between positive and negative religious coping (Pargament et al., 1998). Positive coping may include seeking spiritual support, benevolent religious reframing, forgiveness, confession, lament, and collaborative problem-solving with God. Negative coping may include spiritual discontent, punitive God images, demonic attribution without discernment, interpersonal religious blame, or passive waiting for rescue. Religious coping is related to psychological adjustment, but the direction of this relationship depends on the coping used (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). Spiritual struggle can include divine, moral, interpersonal, demonic, doubt-related, and meaning-related struggles (Exline et al., 2014). A congregant discriminated against because of Christian faith may therefore need more than encouragement to "be strong." The counselor must assess whether the incident has triggered shame, anger at God, doubt, moral confusion, or alienation from the church.

Recent spiritually integrated care literature provides additional guidance. A comprehensive meta-analysis found that psychotherapies adapted to clients' religious and spiritual values can be effective, indicating that religious content is clinically relevant when ethically integrated (Captari et al., 2018). Literature on social work practice argues for competence rather than avoidance when integrating religion and spirituality (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Spiritual and religious competencies for psychologists include awareness of one's own assumptions, knowledge of religious diversity, and skills for respectful assessment (Vieten et al., 2013). Although pastoral counselors are not identical to psychologists, these competency discussions are relevant because churches can harm congregants when pastoral advice becomes simplistic, coercive, or dismissive of mental health and legal realities. Pastoral care must therefore be spiritually confident and professionally humble.

Trauma-informed care deepens this framework. Institutional guidance defines trauma as events or circumstances experienced as harmful or threatening, with lasting adverse effects on functioning and well-being. It outlines principles such as safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Karen McClintock adapts trauma-informed insight for pastoral care, stressing that clergy must avoid retraumatization and recognize embodied distress (McClintock, 2022). The moral injury literature indicates that spiritual care is relevant because moral and spiritual distress can accompany psychological suffering (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Moral injury is also associated with guilt, shame, spiritual struggle, and impairment after morally injurious experiences (Koenig & Al Zaben, 2021). Workplace faith discrimination may not always be trauma in the clinical sense, but repeated humiliation, coercion against conscience, or institutional betrayal can produce trauma-like and moral-injury-like responses.

The gap that grounds this article is therefore not the absence of research on religion at work or the absence of pastoral-care theory. The gap is the lack of a constructive synthesis that translates these bodies of knowledge into a pastoral-counseling approach for congregants who experience workplace discrimination because of their Christian faith. Existing workplace scholarship tends to address organizations, managers, and legal accommodation. Pastoral literature tends to address suffering, grief, trauma, and spiritual meaning more generally. This article connects them by asking how churches can care for discriminated workers in ways that are spiritually faithful, psychologically responsible, and practically wise.

3. Proposed Method

This study uses a conceptual-integrative literature review design rather than field research. It is presented as a research article because it follows a systematic scholarly method of problem formulation, literature selection, thematic analysis, synthesis, and framework construction; however, it does not claim to produce empirical findings from interviews, surveys, or observations. The design is suitable because the research problem is interdisciplinary and underdeveloped in pastoral counseling. Integrative reviews are appropriate when a field requires synthesis across theoretical, empirical, and practice-oriented sources in order to generate new perspectives (Snyder, 2019). Integrative review writing also allows scholars to use past and present literature to clarify future directions (Torraco, 2016). Updated methodology for integrative reviews supports combining diverse empirical and theoretical sources when the aim is conceptual synthesis (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The article, therefore, treats the literature itself as the corpus for analysis.

The sources considered were peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, theological works, and selected institutional documents published before 2024. The core domains were: workplace religious discrimination and accommodation; religious identity at work; perceived discrimination, incivility, bullying, and well-being; religious coping and spiritual struggle; spiritually integrated counseling; trauma-informed care; moral injury; and pastoral theology. Literature was identified through targeted searches in scholarly databases and publishers commonly used for social science, psychology, theology, and management research, including Scopus-indexed journals, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, APA publications, PubMed, Google Scholar, and official institutional repositories. Because the article is conceptual rather than systematic, it does not report a PRISMA flow diagram or claim exhaustive coverage.

The search strategy used combinations of terms such as workplace religious discrimination, Christian faith at work, religious identity in the workplace, religious accommodation, workplace incivility, perceived discrimination and well-being, pastoral counseling, pastoral care, spiritual struggle, religious coping, trauma-informed pastoral care, moral injury, and spiritually integrated care. Inclusion criteria were relevance to the research question, credibility of publication venue, conceptual or empirical contribution, and suitability for theological-practical synthesis. Sources were excluded when they were popular blog posts, unsupported opinion pieces, post-2023 publications, or materials that made claims without a clear scholarly basis. Particular caution was used with workplace statistics: because this article does not analyze new data, it avoids presenting unverified prevalence rates.

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis procedure. First, sources were read for concepts that define the phenomenon: discrimination, harassment, accommodation, identity tension, religious expression, and workplace mistreatment. Second, sources were read for consequences: psychological distress, shame, withdrawal, spiritual struggle, moral injury, and relational isolation. Third, pastoral and counseling sources were analyzed for practices that could respond constructively: safe listening, assessment, lament, theological reframing, religious coping, trauma-informed presence, referral, community support, and advocacy. Fourth,

these categories were integrated into a framework with three findings: faith discrimination as layered injury; pastoral counseling as trauma-informed and spiritually integrated care; and pastoral counseling as agency-forming, justice-sensitive support.

Trustworthiness was pursued through triangulation across disciplines, internal consistency, and citation discipline. The article places pastoral-theological claims in dialogue with empirical literature on discrimination and well-being, and organizational claims in dialogue with pastoral ethics. It also attends to disconfirming cautions: not every conflict involving a Christian employee is discrimination; not every religious expression at work is professionally appropriate; and pastoral counselors should not offer legal advice unless qualified.

Ethically, this review involves no human participants and creates no new dataset. Nevertheless, the topic requires ethical sensitivity because it concerns vulnerable workers, potential retaliation, confidentiality, and religious identity. Pastoral counselors who apply the framework should protect confidentiality, avoid publicizing congregants' cases without consent, encourage accurate documentation, respect organizational procedures, and refer to licensed mental health professionals or legal experts when the case exceeds pastoral competence. The proposed method, therefore, combines literature-based synthesis with practical-theological responsibility.

4. Results and Discussion

Workplace Faith Discrimination as Identity, Relational, and Spiritual Injury

The first analytical finding is that discrimination based on Christian faith should be understood as a layered injury. It is not merely a disagreement over religion, a single rude comment, or an inconvenience in scheduling. In many cases, it affects at least four domains: identity, relationships, organizational standing, and spiritual meaning. Identity is affected because Christian faith is often central to self-understanding and moral vocation. Relationships are affected when colleagues begin to distance themselves, mock the employee, or mark the worker as "too religious." Organizational standing is affected when discrimination influences evaluations, promotions, workloads, or access to informal networks. Spiritual meaning is affected when the congregant begins to ask why faithfulness seems to produce disadvantage, humiliation, or isolation.

This layered understanding is consistent with workplace research. Religious identity can generate tensions when organizational expectations collide with faith commitments (Héliot et al., 2020). Christian employees may interpret discrimination through moral stance, piety, or religious expression (Schneider et al., 2022). The pastor must therefore avoid flattening the case into generic stress management. A Christian worker who is excluded after refusing to engage in dishonest practices, mocked for praying, or penalized for worship obligations may experience the incident as a threat to integrity before God. Even when the organization frames the matter as policy compliance, the congregant may experience it as pressure to divide faith from professional life.

The injury is also often ambiguous. Many workplace conflicts occur through incivility rather than overt hostility. Incivility is subtle but consequential because it can be disguised as humor, impatience, or organizational culture (Cortina et al., 2017). A congregant may hear jokes about Christians, receive fewer invitations to informal gatherings, be excluded from mentoring, or be treated as intellectually inferior because of faith. These acts may not be easy to prove as discrimination, but their cumulative effect can be corrosive. The pastoral counselor should therefore listen carefully without rushing to either validate every perception or dismiss the congregant's distress. Ambiguity itself is part of the burden because the worker must continually interpret whether the harm is accidental, personal, structural, or religiously motivated.

Theological interpretation should also be careful. Christian tradition contains rich resources for endurance, witness, patience, forgiveness, and non-retaliation. However, these virtues can be misused when pastoral counsel encourages silent suffering in contexts where the worker has legitimate procedural options. Conversely, a persecution narrative can become spiritually intoxicating when it simplifies complex workplace dynamics into a battle between the righteous believer and ungodly colleagues. Research on Christian responses to discrimination and violence identifies avoidance, advocacy, and interfaith engagement as distinct responses rather than a single pattern of passive endurance (Bauman & Ponniah, 2017). Pastoral counseling should therefore help congregants discern the nature of the incident, the proportionality of the response, and the difference between suffering for faith and suffering because of poor communication, boundary problems, or unresolved conflict.

A practical implication is that pastoral assessment must be multidimensional. Counselors should explore what happened, who was involved, whether there are patterns, whether

documentation exists, whether policies were violated, and whether the congregant has used appropriate internal procedures. They should also assess symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, anger, shame, avoidance, spiritual doubt, and isolation. Perceived discrimination is associated with poorer well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014). Workplace discrimination is related to negative job outcomes (Dhanani et al., 2018). If the congregant reports panic, severe depression, suicidal ideation, or trauma symptoms, pastoral care must include referral to competent mental health professionals. Spiritual care is not diminished by referral; it becomes more responsible.

This finding reframes the pastoral task. The counselor is not merely a religious comforter nor a workplace strategist. The counselor is a witness to the congregant's suffering who helps name the injury accurately—naming matters because misnaming can harm. If discrimination is named only as "testing from God," the worker may internalize abuse. If it is called "a legal case," the worker's spiritual wound may be neglected. If it is named only as "personal sensitivity," the church participates in silencing. A constructive pastoral response names faith discrimination as a possible identity-related and spiritual injury while still requiring evidence, humility, and discernment.

Trauma-Informed and Spiritually Integrated Pastoral Counseling

The second finding is that pastoral counseling for workplace faith discrimination should be both trauma-informed and spiritually integrated. Trauma-informed care does not require the counselor to label every case as trauma. It requires awareness that repeated humiliation, coercion, exclusion, or institutional betrayal can alter a person's sense of safety, trust, power, and meaning. Institutional guidance on trauma-informed care emphasizes safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Applied pastorally, these principles mean that the counseling space must become a reliable place where the congregant can speak without being mocked, rushed, theologized prematurely, or pressured to take action before emotional regulation is restored.

Safe presence is the first movement. Many discriminated workers have already been forced to explain, defend, or minimize their faith in hostile settings. Pastoral counseling should begin with careful listening: What exactly occurred? What was said? How did the worker respond? What does the event mean spiritually? What is feared now? Carrie Doehring's account of lived theology is useful because crises often reveal unspoken beliefs about God, self, and others (Doehring, 2015). A congregant who says, "Maybe God is punishing me," "Maybe I should hide my faith," or "Maybe Christians cannot survive in professional spaces" is revealing lived theology that needs gentle exploration rather than immediate correction. Howard Clinebell's healing-and-growth orientation also suggests that care should strengthen capacities rather than merely reduce pain (Clinebell, 2011).

Lament is a crucial Christian resource in this process. Discriminated congregants may feel anger, shame, confusion, and a desire for vindication. Pastoral care sometimes moves too quickly to forgiveness or victory language. However, biblical lament gives believers language for grief before God without denying faith. Lament can prevent two distortions: repression of pain and revenge-driven spirituality. It allows the congregant to tell the truth about humiliation while remaining in a relationship with God. This practice is consistent with research on religious coping. Positive religious coping is not the denial of distress but the use of faith to seek support, meaning, and collaborative agency (Pargament, 1997).

The counselor must also assess negative religious coping and spiritual struggle. Religious coping has different psychological associations depending on whether it is positive or negative (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). Spiritual struggles can involve anger toward God, guilt, moral confusion, demonic fear, doubt, interpersonal religious conflict, and loss of meaning (Exline et al., 2014). In a workplace case, negative coping may appear as fatalism, compulsive self-blame, demonizing coworkers, refusing any professional process, or interpreting all criticism as anti-Christian hostility. These responses may feel religious, but they can still intensify distress or impair judgment. Pastoral counseling should therefore help the congregant move from a reactive to a discerning interpretation.

Spiritually integrated counseling must be ethically disciplined. Therapies adapted to religious and spiritual values can be effective, but adaptation requires competence (Captari et al., 2018). Helpers need skills and self-awareness when addressing spirituality (Vieten et al., 2013). In church contexts, pastors may share the congregant's faith and therefore assume quick understanding. Shared faith can create trust, but it can also create blind spots. A counselor who has strong views about secular workplaces may unintentionally amplify fear. A counselor who values submission may unintentionally silence protest. A counselor who values public witness may unintentionally push the worker toward confrontational behavior, thereby increasing

risk. Competent pastoral care asks what is wise for this person, this workplace, this evidence, and this stage of distress.

Theologically, reframing should be restorative rather than manipulative. The counselor may help the congregant distinguish identity from organizational judgment: being mocked at work does not mean the worker's faith is shameful. The counselor may also distinguish vocation from a particular job: Christian calling may include the present workplace, but it may also require seeking safer employment if harm becomes severe. The counselor may explore forgiveness as a process rather than a demand, especially when the discriminatory pattern continues. Spiritual practices such as prayer, Scripture meditation, confession, silence, worship, and communal intercession can be powerful. However, they should not replace documentation, HR procedures, mental health care, or legal consultation when needed.

Pastoral counseling should also consider moral injury. A congregant may feel morally injured when pressured to violate conscience, punished for honesty, or betrayed by leaders who claim neutrality while permitting religious hostility. Moral injury should be addressed through a bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach rather than through purely psychological or purely devotional categories (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Moral injury is associated with shame, guilt, spiritual distress, and impairment (Koenig & Al Zaben, 2021). In workplace discrimination, moral injury may arise not only from what the congregant did but from what the institution demanded, tolerated, or ignored. The pastoral counselor can help the worker process betrayal, reclaim moral agency, and decide what forms of repair, protest, exit, or endurance are appropriate.

The outcome of trauma-informed and spiritually integrated pastoral counseling is not emotional numbness. It is a regulated agency. The congregant should become more capable of accurately describing the situation, praying honestly, thinking clearly, using resources wisely, and acting without being governed by panic, shame, or revenge. This is where pastoral counseling differs from motivational religious speech. It does not simply tell the worker to be brave; it creates conditions in which courage becomes possible and disciplined.

From Passive Endurance to Prudent Agency and Public Witness

The third finding is that pastoral counseling should move congregants from passive endurance toward prudent agency and public witness. Endurance is a Christian virtue, but endurance without agency can become spiritualized helplessness. Agency does not mean impulsive confrontation. It means the capacity to interpret, choose, act, and seek support in ways that are faithful, ethical, and contextually wise. A practical pastoral framework can be described in four movements: receive and recognize the story; interpret and integrate the injury; restore and regulate the person; and act and advocate with prudence. These movements are not rigid stages but recurring tasks in counseling.

The first movement, receive and recognize, centers on listening, factual clarification, and emotional validation. The counselor receives the story without interrogation but also helps the congregant separate facts, interpretations, feelings, and desired outcomes. This distinction matters in discrimination cases because poor documentation can weaken the worker's ability to seek help. The congregant may be encouraged to record dates, statements, witnesses, policy references, performance evaluations, accommodation requests, and responses. Such documentation is not contrary to faith; it is a form of truthfulness and stewardship. It protects the congregant from relying solely on memory under stress and helps any future advisor, HR officer, lawyer, or counselor understand the pattern.

The second movement, interpret and integrate, addresses theological meaning. The pastoral counselor helps the congregant ask: What part of Christian identity was involved? Was the conflict about belief, practice, speech, ethics, personality, performance, or organizational policy? Has the congregant contributed to the escalation? Is there evidence of differential treatment? What biblical or theological resources illuminate the situation without oversimplifying it? Richard Osmer's practical theological tasks are useful here because they prevent interpretation from being either purely sociological or purely devotional (Osmer, 2008). The counselor listens to the concrete event, interprets it through relevant knowledge, evaluates it theologically, and asks what faithful response is required.

The third movement, restore and regulate, attends to the worker's internal and communal resources. Restoration may include prayer, lament, spiritual direction, counseling sessions, rest, sleep repair, family support, and medical or psychological referral. It may also include reconnection with a small group or a trusted church community. However, community support must be governed by confidentiality. Churches can unintentionally intensify harm by turning a workplace case into public testimony before the congregant is ready or before facts are clear. A wise congregation becomes a shelter, not a rumor network. It helps the worker regain stability, not perform suffering.

The fourth movement, act and advocate, addresses external response. Depending on the case, prudent action may include informal dialogue with a supervisor, a written accommodation request, use of HR procedures, consultation with a union or professional association, legal advice, mediation, a transfer, a job search, or a formal complaint. Official guidance can help workers in some jurisdictions understand concepts of accommodation and harassment, but pastoral counselors should not present themselves as legal experts (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). The church's role is to support discernment and referral. Accommodation decisions involve legal, organizational, and relational dynamics; thus, a worker needs practical wisdom rather than only spiritual encouragement (Tabesh & Jolly, 2019).

Public witness is the final horizon of agency. Christian witness at work is not limited to verbal proclamation; it includes integrity, respect, competence, truthful documentation, refusal of retaliation, willingness to reconcile, and commitment to justice. When discrimination occurs, the worker's response can either reproduce hostility or embody a different moral imagination. This does not mean accepting abuse. It means resisting abuse without surrendering Christian character. Research on Indonesian Muslim workers in Taiwan, though focused on a different religious group, illustrates that questions of religious accommodation require dialogue among workers, employers, the government, and religious leaders (Sampurna, 2019). Churches caring for Christian workers can learn from this broader interreligious accommodation literature: religious freedom is strengthened when communities advocate for dignity in ways that are intelligible to plural workplaces.

This agency-oriented approach also protects against a narrow individualism. Workplace faith discrimination can isolate the congregant and make the person feel uniquely targeted. Pastoral counseling should connect individual care to congregational formation. Churches can teach members how to practice faith at work with humility and courage, how to request accommodation respectfully, how to respond to mockery, how to discern when to speak and when to remain silent, and how to seek help early. Pastors can build referral networks with Christian mental health professionals, employment lawyers, HR practitioners, and chaplains. Research on workplace chaplaincy shows that spiritual support in secular organizations can be constructive, although confidentiality and managerial instrumentalization remain risks (Wolf & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2023). The church can similarly develop workplace-sensitive pastoral competence without becoming an anti-institutional echo chamber.

The contribution of this third finding is that pastoral counseling becomes constructive when it joins compassion with wisdom. It neither tells the congregant to submit nor pushes the congregant into immediate confrontation. It helps the believer become truthful, regulated, spiritually rooted, and practically prepared. In this sense, pastoral counseling is not only reactive care after injury; it is formative ministry that prepares Christians to inhabit workplaces as faithful professionals who can endure suffering, seek justice, and avoid unnecessary escalation.

5. Comparison

Compared with previous workplace religious discrimination studies, this article shifts the primary audience from organizations and managers to pastors, pastoral counselors, and congregations. Prior studies explain the phenomenon, the mechanisms of religious identity, and the organizational accommodation processes, but they do not develop an ecclesial counseling model (Ghumman et al., 2013). Research on religious identity at work clarifies the organizational dimension but does not translate that insight into pastoral practice (Héliot et al., 2020). Comparative interview research helps describe how discrimination is perceived, yet its primary contribution is not a counseling framework for congregations (Schneider et al., 2022). This article extends such work by asking how churches should respond after discrimination enters the counseling room as shame, anger, fear, spiritual struggle, and vocational confusion.

Compared with pastoral-care literature, the article offers a more workplace-specific and discrimination-sensitive application. Howard Clinebell, Carrie Doehring, Emmanuel Lartey, Karen McClintock, and Richard Osmer provide broad frameworks for healing, contextual interpretation, trauma-informed care, and practical theology (Doehring, 2015). Trauma-informed pastoral care helps address embodied distress and retraumatization risk, but it does not by itself specify how churches should respond to workplace religious discrimination (McClintock, 2022). Practical theology helps organize discernment, yet this article applies it to a concrete pastoral problem: congregants who experience discrimination at work because of their Christian faith (Osmer, 2008). Its added value lies in connecting spiritual care with documentation, accommodation, referral, and public witness.

The approach has strengths and limitations. Its strength is interdisciplinary synthesis: it integrates organizational research, psychology of discrimination, religious coping, trauma-informed care, and pastoral theology. It also avoids fabricated empirical claims and treats the article as a work of conceptual analysis. Its limitation is the absence of field data from Christian workers, pastors, employers, or HR practitioners. It also does not resolve jurisdiction-specific legal questions, which vary widely across countries. Future empirical studies should test the framework through interviews, case studies, pastoral counselor focus groups, and contextual research in churches whose members work in religiously diverse or restrictive environments.

6. Conclusions

This article has argued that pastoral counseling for congregants who experience workplace discrimination because of their Christian faith must be constructive, interdisciplinary, and ethically careful. The main findings are threefold. First, workplace faith discrimination should be understood as a layered injury involving identity, relationships, organizational standing, and spiritual meaning. Second, pastoral counseling should be trauma-informed and spiritually integrated, combining safe presence, lament, theological reframing, assessment of religious coping, spiritual struggle, and appropriate referral. Third, pastoral care should form a prudent agency so that congregants can document, discern, seek accommodation, use organizational procedures, pursue reconciliation where possible, and advocate for justice where necessary.

The article answers its research objective by proposing a framework that resists both passive endurance and reactionary persecution narratives. It contributes theoretically by linking the literature on workplace religious discrimination with pastoral theology and research on religious coping. It contributes practically by offering pastors a counseling logic that begins with safety and listening, proceeds through theological and psychological discernment, and moves toward wise action. The church's role is not to replace HR systems, therapists, or legal professionals, but to become a spiritually competent community that helps believers remain truthful, faithful, and resilient under pressure.

The principal limitation is that the article is conceptual and based on the literature. It does not report interviews, survey data, or case outcomes. Its claims should therefore be treated as a constructive framework requiring empirical refinement. Future research should examine how Christian employees actually experience workplace faith discrimination across sectors, how pastors currently counsel such cases, what referral networks are available, and which pastoral interventions reduce shame, isolation, and spiritual struggle. Comparative studies across different religious contexts would be valuable.

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