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# The Consequences of Integrating Faith into Academic Writing: Casuistic Stretching and Biblical Citation

**Jeffrey M. Ringer**

*It's been a real struggle the past week to write it. [. . .] I thought about, why don't I just change this topic? It would be a lot easier. Like, this is really frustrating. But I felt God saying, "No, just keep plugging away at this." And I just couldn't, like—I was just like, "God, how—I just can't write this right now. Why did you tell me to write this? I don't know what to say.*

—Austin on writing "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools"

Austin's[1] frustration was evident. It was our fourth interview—we had one more to go—and his enthusiasm about integrating his evangelical Christian faith into his academic writing had given way to anxiety. The persuasive research paper he was writing for his first-year writing (FYW) class was due the next day, and, as the epigraph indicates, he was struggling to complete it, to figure out "what to say." Much of Austin's struggle stemmed from the topic he had chosen: he was arguing on behalf of religiously affiliated schools, defending them against claims that Christian education in particular amounted to brainwashing. The reason he chose such a risky topic (Austin attended a midsized public university in the Northeast where few others shared his faith) had much to do with his identity as an evangelical who had attended a Christian school for four years. Equally important, he was responding to an in-class conversation wherein one of his classmates publicly disparaged religion by declaring God to be "fake." For Austin, writing "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools" was a chance to defend his faith and negotiate an identity as an evangelical at a public university.

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Given my own evangelical background, I could appreciate Austin's frustration. And because I attended a private Christian college before matriculating to two different state universities for graduate school, I knew firsthand the difficulties associated with trying to make sense of one's faith in a secular academic setting. I knew, too, how difficult it was to argue for deeply held beliefs while enacting an academic discourse that, in Anne Gere's words, features an "impoverished" set of terms for doing so (46). Because Austin's audience did not share his faith, I knew he would need to find a means of persuasion outside of the evangelical Christian discourse he knew so well as a faithful member of an evangelical campus ministry and local church. Because I was not his FYW instructor—he was participating in research that focused on evangelical identity and academic writing—it was not my place to advise him how best to proceed with his essay. Instead, my role was to interview Austin about his academic writing and, as it turned out, to explore how he struggled to negotiate an identity as an evangelical writing academically for a secular audience at a public university.

That evangelicals like Austin populate FYW courses at public universities is nothing new in composition studies. Scholars such as Chris Anderson, Lizabeth Rand, Elizabeth Vander Lei, Shannon Carter, and Michael-John DePalma, among others, have sought ways to understand evangelicals and help them engage productively with academic discourse. Though such scholarship certainly has helped compositionists understand evangelical identity, surprisingly absent in the conversation is significant attention to how writing academically influences students' faith-based identities. In other words, although compositionists have considered evangelical identity from the vantage of what such students bring to their academic writing, few have considered what happens when evangelical students integrate their faith into academic writing. If it is true, as Donna LeCourt contends, that "academic discourse *does* influence the construction of self" (143), then what are the identity consequences for evangelicals who integrate their faith in their academic writing? More specifically, what happens to the faith-based identities of evangelicals like Austin when they attempt to convey deeply held beliefs to an audience that does not share them?

I explore these questions by considering Austin's experience writing "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools." His case study illustrates a potential consequence of integrating evangelical Christian faith into academic writing in a public university context. Specifically, incorporating his faith into an academic assignment for an audience that holds views different from his own causes Austin to face a key epistemological dilemma: does his evangelical Christian faith represent absolute truth, or is it one legitimate option among many? In William Perry's terms, Austin's writing of "Christian Schools" causes him to account for the legitimacy of pluralism within his primarily dualistic frame. Although Austin did acknowledge the existence of perspectives other than his own prior to writing "Christian Schools," he viewed them

as illegitimate, as "wrong" in relation to the "rightness" of Christianity. As such, Austin's epistemology aligned most closely with the position Perry calls *multiplicity pre-legitimate*, wherein "[m]ultiplicity has not yet attained the status of epistemological legitimacy" and "the Absolute remains secure and close at hand" (87–88). In his attempt to persuade his non-Christian audience that Christian schools are beneficial, Austin makes an argument that nudges him toward a more relativistic position: he identifies himself discursively with his audience's view that there are multiple legitimate perspectives, thus "open[ing] a path toward doubt" regarding his belief in absolute truth (Perry 88).

Austin's argument results from his rhetorical sensitivity: he's fully aware of writing for a non-Christian audience and goes to impressive lengths to accommodate his audience's values (Ivanič 245). One value in particular to which Austin appeals is the freedom of choice, a value that in and of itself is not contrary to his evangelical faith. But the way he accommodates that value—by citing a biblical passage that he casuistically stretches in order to identify with his audience (Burke, *Attitudes* 229)—suggests that Austin subordinates one of his core evangelical beliefs to the pluralistic view that perspectives other than Christianity are legitimate. Although such a possibility would be welcomed by many compositionists who embrace pluralism, the fact that Austin is unaware of his rhetorical move's implications should concern writing theorists who seek to value their students' identities and beliefs, religious or not. Austin's "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools" thus represents a compelling site of identity construction, one that provides compositionists with important insight into the identity-negotiation processes of one evangelical FYW student, and prompts writing theorists not only to interrogate how writing academically may implicate students' most deeply held beliefs, but also to make such identity consequences explicit to students.

The research I cite in this essay comes from a case study I conducted with Austin during the fall of 2008. It was part of a larger project wherein I interviewed three evangelical Christian FYW students at a midsized state university in the Northeast. By *evangelical*, I mean Christians who believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, emphasize the importance of conversion, believe in maintaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and seek to share their faith (Balmer and Winner; Marty; Noll, *American*; Noll, "The Future"). I identified Austin and the other participants through a well-known evangelical campus ministry. I interviewed each student five times, analyzed their academic writing, and asked them to write responses to a predetermined set of prompts. In this essay, I draw heavily on my interviews with Austin and on his "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools" essay. Before doing so, I'll first consider the relationship between writing and identity, and then situate my discussion of Austin in recent scholarship on evangelical students in composition studies.

## Identity, Academic Writing, and Casuistic Stretching

Numerous scholars have theorized the relationship between identity and academic writing. Roz Ivanič, for instance, argues that "identity in relation to writing" results from the interplay of an individual's *autobiographical self*, *discoursal self*, and *self as author*, the first two of which I focus on in this essay. In any act of writing, an individual constructs a discoursal self, which is informed by the writer's autobiographical self—"the identity of a person in the act of writing" (24)—and shaped by the particular writing conventions on which he or she draws. As Ivanič explains, "writing is an act of identity in which writers align themselves" with values, beliefs, and assumptions that may or may not correspond to their senses of self (109). Much of Ivanič's book is thus devoted to exploring how writers negotiate the varying overlaps and conflicts that exist between the identities offered by genre conventions or audience expectations and a writer's "desired self" (225). And as Ivanič suggests, individuals' autobiographical selves are constructed not only through experiences, but also through "their way of representing these experiences" (24)—the terms they have to name such events.

LeCourt says something similar when she theorizes how the act of writing influences one's social self—the self that, in Raúl Sánchez's terms, exists "'outside' of textuality" (Sánchez 236). LeCourt writes, "We learn our identities in discursive relations that mediate experience; we perceive our bodies in their material relation to the world via such discursively constructed identities" (19). The terms available to us shape how we see ourselves and act in the world, such that "[o]ur rhetorics of identity [. . .] *are* us" (LeCourt 31). Although student writers in particular tend to "perceive academic discourse only as learning a particular linguistic act," what happens is more complicated: their "education opens up a site of discursive-material interaction that further affects one's relations to other forms of social being" (40). In other words, how students are taught to think and write influences how they identify in the material world. This comes about through identification with discourse choices and then with the subject positions available therein (88). Such identification begins with the act of writing, because it is through writing that "students are positioned *within* academic discourse, compelled to resee their own subjectivities through this discourse" (133). As they adopt new frames of reference, students identify with the subjective positions offered by "schooled language" (59). This leads to identity formation, wherein individuals interiorize certain subject positions and reject others "in order to mark the boundaries by which we might constitute self" (146).

LeCourt's hope is that students will construct hybrid subjectivities that value various aspects of their identities. She admits, though, that achieving such agency is not easy. For FYW students in particular, that difficulty might arise from a limited discursive repertoire and a lack of awareness regarding the identity consequences of discourse choices. They may not know, for instance, when a particular choice might

align them with a perspective they would rather disown. Of course, the ability to make such choices would amount to a form of agency. Beth Daniell, for example, praises literacy scholarship that affords individuals the agency to "reject or modify or accept the identity offered" instead of "compelling people to adopt the attitudes, beliefs, values, and identities offered" (374). Ivanič says something similar when she notes that students can "decide how far they will be true to themselves in appropriating [their readers'] values and meeting [their] expectations" (245). Such agency, though, is contingent on an individual's ability to recognize how, when, and for what ends they might (not) make certain discourse choices, particularly in terms of the values and beliefs with which they hope to align themselves or avoid. What happens, though, when a FYW student makes a discourse choice she thinks aligns with a core belief or value but that in reality conflicts with it?

Kenneth Burke's notion of *casuistic stretching* provides a framework for understanding the consequences of such a move. In *Attitudes toward History*, Burke defines casuistic stretching as a process wherein "one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles" (229). Burke speaks favorably of casuistic stretching in *Attitudes*, noting that "language owes its very existence to casuistry" and that a "truly liquid attitude towards" language would lead to "a firmer kind of certainty" without "the deceptive comforts of ideological rigidity" (230–31). One could certainly envision how such a post-structuralist view could lead to agency. But while Burke sees casuistic stretching as present in all language, he recognizes that some acts of casuistic stretching are more impure than others. Casuistry is pure when the different purposes its enactment seeks to fulfill are more alike than not, while stretching one principle to accommodate a radically different one represents a "perversion of casuistry" (*Rhetoric* 154–55). Thus, Burke argues that "casuistic stretching must itself be subjected continually to *conscious* attention," lest such stretching lead to "mystification" or "the concealing of a strategy" (*Attitudes* 232). Burke's concern is that a rhetor might consciously deceive an audience, but it is also possible to envision the rhetor himself as mystified if he inadvertently stretches a principle in making a particular discourse choice. And the results of such casuistic stretching could have identity ramifications. As Burke explains, casuistic stretching can result in "demoralization," the undermining of the morals or principles held by an individual (*Attitudes* 229).

When considered in terms of identity and writing, casuistic stretching can serve as a process through which an individual not only engages with a perspective other than one's own, but also comes potentially to identify with and then interiorize it. As such, casuistic stretching may be a means through which students who believe in absolute truth move from dualism toward relativism, a key stage of development that Perry outlines in *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*. Writing about dualistically minded students, Perry explains that encounters with

pluralism in college can raise questions of whether absolute truth exists (68). Such encounters with "otherness" eventually lead to "transformations in [the] structure" of dualistic thought (71). These are not transformations in which students will immediately abandon a dualistic perspective for a relativistic one—demoralization, to put it colloquially, doesn't happen overnight. Rather, Perry explains, dualism "is first modified and loosened by a series of accommodations necessitated by its assimilation of the pluralism of both peer group and curriculum" (61). These accommodations lead individuals to acknowledge what Perry calls the "potential of legitimacy in otherness," the view that there are legitimate perspectives other than one's own (64, 71). What facilitates such recognition of legitimacy is the fact that, as Perry and his researchers found, "students appear to bring with them the expectation of identification with the college community" (65). Of course, an expectation to identify with peers and the curriculum may not come to fruition—some students, upon encountering pluralism, will retreat toward dualism. But the very *encounter* with pluralism, coupled with the desire for identification, is what can challenge an individual's belief in absolute truth—a belief held by many evangelicals.

## Evangelical Identity and First-Year Writing

For evangelical FYW students, such encounters with pluralism can occur via the act of writing academically. Carter, in fact, has identified pluralism as the "goal" of "academic rhetoric," arguing that "the function of the college composition classroom seems to be, at the very least, to enable [evangelicals] to speak to readers who do not" share the same beliefs (578). Carter also hopes that fostering *rhetorical dexterity*, which entails learning a new literacy by drawing on a familiar one, might help evangelicals "negotiate the increasingly complex literacy contexts" they will encounter in college without compromising their faith-based identities (588). In other words, Carter hopes that valuing evangelicals' biblical literacies will help such students fulfill Vander Lei's goal: that evangelicals would not "alter what they believe," but instead "learn to use tension between faith [. . .] and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better" (Vander Lei 8). And rhetorical dexterity does hold promise for helping students maintain ties to their evangelical identities. But if part of an evangelical's identity entails the belief that Christianity represents absolute truth, then developing a pluralistic viewpoint would challenge such a belief. And writing academically, especially if the goal is pluralism, will likely raise questions about the nature of truth for evangelicals.

Scholars such as Anderson have not been ignorant to this possibility:

> [I]f we teach [students] to write with complexity about their religious experience [. . .], are we not then changing their faith—not giving them the right to their own language

> but implicitly and explicitly offering a model of what we think of as a better, because more sophisticated, understanding of religious experience? (26)

Anderson acknowledges that changing evangelical students' language likely amounts to changing the "quality" and "character" of such students' beliefs (26). Similarly, after helping an evangelical revise and "think more critically" while "integrat[ing] faith and learning in his writing assignment," Juanita Smart raises a concern about her student's dualistic identity: "what cost do such acts of re-vision exact on the privately intuited, epistemological registries of the student?" (20–21). An excellent question, as is Anderson's, and yet neither scholar offers a thorough answer. Anderson, for instance, uses the opportunity to reiterate his faith in academic discourse and remind writing instructors that they are "always in the business of recommending values, insisting on faiths" (26). As long as instructors are aware that they're changing students' relationships to their faith, Anderson assumes, then the change is okay, as is evidenced by the fact that he is not "confessing uneasiness or contradiction" in changing the terms his students use to name their faith (26). Smart admits that her dualistic student, who once had intended to become an English professor, switched to a business major (21). And although Anderson and Smart do recognize that they're dealing with students' deeply held beliefs (and identities), neither one fully addresses the identity consequences of asking students to re-see their faith through academic discourse.

One scholar who does so is Stephen Barrett. In his semi-autobiographical dissertation *This Gonna Hurt Like Hell*, Barrett considers "what happens when a student who is constructed as antithetical to the academy enters the academy" (35). Weaving together personal narrative, family history, and composition theory, Barrett admits that he ultimately "deconverts" from his Pentecostal Christian faith, an actuality that leaves him in a kind of identity limbo: "From a Pentecostal perspective, the person I am become is 'lost,' 'backslidden,' [. . .] From an academic perspective, I may be almost as questionable a character, an academic with all this Pentecostal baggage to carry around" (170). Based on his experience, Barrett recognizes that "many faith-centered students" in the public university will have their faiths challenged regardless of their writing instructors' motives or pedagogy. He thus urges writing teachers to be "aware of some consequences of our pedagogies" for such students (149), not the least of which are deconversion and dislocation.

Another consequence—resistance toward pluralism—is also evident in composition scholarship. In many ways, Doug Hunt's "Rob Campbell" is the archetypal fundamentalist student entrenched in dualism: "I had most of my views and beliefs intact before I came [to college]," Rob tells Hunt. "In fact [*he laughs*], I had them all intact" (10). Rob goes on to discuss his religious background—about being raised attending church, about being influenced by his brother's faith, about his belief in creationism and the Bible as Truth (10–11). But Rob is not an ideal student: he misses

long stretches of class and doesn't turn in assignments. What he does turn in reflects his dualism. Hunt notes that Rob interprets one assignment as follows: "Decide which of these two television families is good and which is bad. Give evidence for your view" (78). As a result, Rob turns in a draft "filled with short sentences delivered as self-evident truths" on which he doesn't fare well grade-wise (79). In Hunt's estimation, Rob "didn't come to the university to see the world from a perspective other than his own," an assessment that links Rob's dualism—and resistance—to his faith (104). And when Rob is confronted with relativism, he "retreats toward Dualism" (Hunt 103).

Rob's thoroughly dualistic perspective hinders him from succeeding in his academic writing. A different possibility emerges when we consider students like "Thomas," an evangelical honors FYW student whom DePalma discusses in his recent work about how William James's pragmatism can help compositionists value student faith. DePalma describes Thomas as "an intelligent and highly motivated student with a high regard for his academic work" whose research-based writing "provided thoughtful, fair-minded, and nuanced representations of the various stakeholders he was engaging" (228–29). DePalma notes that even when it comes to citing the Bible in his FYW course, Thomas does so "dialogically" as opposed to "dogmatically." Because he is able to "negotiat[e] the contradictions, complexities, and mysteries of his experiences among a variety of competing belief systems" (DePalma 234), Thomas serves as a counterpoint to Rob. DePalma does admit that Thomas's writing isn't perfect—Thomas incorporates phrasings that many writing scholars would see as inappropriate for a public university composition course. DePalma thus provides suggestions toward helping "students like Thomas develop vocabularies that will allow them to effectively draw upon their faith commitments in academic writing and gain a serious hearing with diverse audiences" (237). But DePalma's message is clear: evangelical identity can be valuable to academic writing in a public university context.

I certainly agree with DePalma and hope to help my own students "negotiat[e] the contradictions, complexities, and mysteries [. . .] among a variety of competing belief systems." I am similarly persuaded that Carter's pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity provides a useful tool with which to value students' evangelical literacies. I hope that such perspectives could value faith to the degree that students are able to maintain their evangelical identities, yet neither Carter nor DePalma addresses fully the question of what happens when evangelical students *do* integrate their faith into their academic writing. In Smart's words, they don't consider the "cost" that asking students to "re-vision" their faith in light of pluralism might "exact" on such students' evangelical identities (21). To be sure, Carter illustrates the hopeful results of rhetorical dexterity by discussing the writing of an evangelical named Keneshia. As Carter notes, Keneshia is able to develop a "Christian mind" while also "attempt-

ing to make sense of her own Christian literacies in terms legible and accessible to those much less literate in Christianity as it manifests itself in evangelical churches like her own" (Carter 591). Carter, though, fails to entertain the possibility that the very act of engaging with pluralism may be what challenges a central premise often held by students such as Keneshia, Thomas, and Austin—that Christianity represents absolute truth.

I am certainly not advocating that we encourage students to see only one perspective as valid and reject all others. But I am advocating that writing instructors come to terms with the potential implications of asking evangelical students to adopt a pluralistic view. Even if the evangelical students we teach are more like Thomas or Keneshia than Rob, the very act of putting evangelical faith in dialogue with other perspectives may lead students to consider their own perspectives as contingent, a realization that could lead to demoralization, dislocation, or even deconversion for students whose identities rest on such a belief. Carter and DePalma do offer ways of valuing student faith, but not without changing it, potentially in significant ways. And Austin's experience provides insight into how writing academically might serve as a catalyst for such a change.

## Context: Exigency, Purpose, Silence

Like many evangelicals who grew up in church, Austin couldn't quite pinpoint the exact moment of his conversion. "It was a really gradual process," he told me in our first interview. "I knew there was a time [. . .] that I accepted Jesus. But to be honest, I really don't remember the exact time I did. It just kinda—happened." He also recalled that faith wasn't important "until about fifth grade" when he began to have significant religious experiences: "This one night I was just praying and the presence of God was so there," Austin said. "That was a very defining moment in God saying, 'I'm real. I want to be with you. You're my child.'" Austin also pointed to a Christian summer camp he attended that impacted his faith: "I was so on fire for God coming out of that camp. I was like, 'We're going to church, right?' I was all pumped up about it." Austin's biblical literacy, a central component of his faith, also developed at an early age. As a child attending a Bible church in the South, Austin remembered owning a "little green Bible" that "had all these different Bible stories in it." In our first interview, he recalled reading one particular story:

> One thing I vividly remember was they had the story of Jesus dying on the cross. They had Jesus hanging on the cross. One thing that I remember is Jesus turning to the guy next to him and saying, "Your . . ."—I can't remember the exact words—but it talks about how "Your faith has earned you a place in heaven," and the other guy's saying, "Oh, you're a fool." That just—I don't know why—but that just kinda always stuck out to me.

Though Austin admits he didn't completely understand the story at age eight, he took the opportunity in our first interview to reflect on what it meant to him as a college student:

> I just see, like, the love Jesus had when he was dying for everyone. He was pleading for the forgiveness of the Roman soldiers who were persecuting him, just saying, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." I look at that now and it's just so piercing. And just how, no matter what you do, Jesus is up there praying for you, saying, "God, please, just forgive these people. Save them." I feel Jesus gives that to us as Christians to be praying for those who don't know Him, and just knowing that if they aren't saved, they are going to the worst place imaginable. It breaks my heart. I don't want to see that happen to anybody.

Later, after moving to the Northeast, Austin attended a Christian middle school, an experience that served as "a defining moment of [his] walk with Christ." As he put it, "I became a Christian at that school."

When I interviewed Austin in the fall of 2008, he was a traditional first-semester student enrolled in his university's required FYW course. Like many FYW classes, his numbered about twenty students and was taught by a graduate teaching assistant, a doctoral student in literature who had Catholic roots and who told me that Austin was one of her favorite students. The course featured three essays—analytical, persuasive, and personal—and thus followed the university's FYW program guidelines. The course does have a common syllabus, but only first-year TAs are required to use it. Instructors are then encouraged to design their own assignments, so long as they include the three types of essays. Instructors are also strongly encouraged to feature revision and conferencing, but the most stringent requirement is that all courses assign a persuasive research essay, the primary goal of which is to help students learn to write and support an academic argument, a common goal in FYW courses nationally. Irene Clark and Betty Bamberg noted in 2003 that "the argument essay has assumed increasing importance" (253), while Richard Fulkerson has observed the trend in composition courses toward "treating writing as argument for a reader" (672) and Elizabeth Wardle has described the argument assignment as a "common genre" in FYW courses (775). And in her analysis of how argument is defined in common FYW textbooks, A. Abby Knoblauch's findings regarding the sheer number of FYW texts that focus on argument attest to its significance in composition curricula (247).

The research component of the argumentative essay also reflects common assumptions, namely about the nature of persuasion in academic argument. As Mike Rose said so well, academic argument is "a calculated marshalling of information, a sort of exposition aimed at persuading" (111). Toward that end, the FYW program guidelines cite the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, which states that students having taken FYW should "[u]nderstand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including

finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources." Such an emphasis is evident in the assignment for which Austin was writing, as well as in his essay itself. But while instructors in the course were required to assign a persuasive essay for which students needed to locate and use such sources, they were not required to assign certain topics. Austin's instructor thus allowed students to choose their own. In our second interview, when Austin described the persuasive research assignment, he admitted that he could not "quite think of something that [he] would research and persuade someone on." Austin thus conceived of academic argument in a traditional sense, wherein "winning and persuading one's opponent(s)" are privileged (Knoblauch 248).

Students in the required FYW course at Austin's university tend to be rather homogenous: overwhelmingly white and middle-class, they often are recent high school graduates from the Northeast who "know school" and take few risks in their writing. (As one former instructor recently told me, student writing in the course was "pretty safe" and "rarely challenged anyone's thinking.") Because the FYW course is required of all students, it tends to foster mild apathy and general resentment—it is a hoop to jump through, albeit a familiar hoop. Resistance is rare; most students do what the instructor asks, eager to pass the class and move on into their major courses. And given the northeastern location of this public university, evangelical faith like Austin's is not common. Austin did note the presence of another Christian in his FYW class, a student with whom he had "gotten together" and "played some worship songs." And many students would likely identify with the "cultural Catholicism" common in the region. But by and large, few students in Austin's class identified wholeheartedly with any faith tradition, much less evangelical Christianity.

My interviews with Austin started in early October, ran through early December, and thus coincided with the persuasive research assignment. Like many FYW students, Austin wanted to make a good grade. But because his topic aligned closely with his evangelical identity, Austin arguably was more invested in writing his persuasive research essay than were many of his peers. In our fourth interview, he told me that he had "never had a research paper [. . .] so near and dear to [him]" and that it was "something [he] really care[d] about." While admittedly cliché, these statements did reflect the attitude Austin adopted toward writing "Christian Schools." Austin's experience thus illustrates Ivanič's point that academic essays, when the topic and its attendant values are "closely bound up with" the writer's sense of self, can function as a personal "statement" for the writer (222). And Austin's sense of self was thoroughly evangelical. Rand defines evangelicals as students for whom faith serves as their "primary sense of selfhood" (350), a definition Austin fit perfectly. During our second interview, for instance, Austin told me he had quit the crew team, a sport in which he had participated since high school. When I asked him why, he told me he realized he "was starting to identify [himself] as more of an athlete" than

"a Christian." Austin went on to explain that "God really convicted" him that he should quit crew so he could focus on being a student and ministering to his peers. Austin proactively sought to ensure that his faith remained his primary identity.

Austin's desire to minister to his peers played a role in his decision to write "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools." What also played a role was his sense that God had called him to do so, a call that came in conjunction with an in-class discussion wherein a classmate named Chris voiced a disparaging comment about religion. In our second interview, Austin recalled Chris's remark as an exclamation during a conversation about "how religious schools have affected our society" and how students from such schools "are going out blind and they're not being taught the theory of evolution, and things like that." As Austin recalled it, Chris declared, "Agh! There is no God! It's just fake!" I first became aware of this moment in the letter Austin wrote for our second interview. The prompt invited Austin to describe his experience as an evangelical in his FYW course. Austin begins his letter to Chris as follows:

> In class the other day I remember we were talking about possible topics for our next paper and the idea of religious schools came up. You went on to say how you thought everything was just a big joke and there was no God. I'm not offended by your comment but would like to tell you about how being Christian effects [*sic*] my classwork. When I'm given an assignment or have discussions in class, the morals and values I hold to be true do not waver because it is schoolwork. If anything I bring my faith into every situation I am in. My relationship with God is something I can never be separated from [. . .].

Austin constructs himself as someone who calmly, rationally seeks to inform. He assumes that if he can explain how his faith shapes his schoolwork, students like Chris may come to value his perspective.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that Austin chose to remain silent during the discussion:

> I walked out of class feeling very—almost down—because I didn't say anything. 'Cuz, well, one thing I was—I said I wasn't very offended. I was actually, like, I wanted to flip out, to be honest. [. . .] But the way I was thinking, I was like, there's no way I can step out right now and be an effective witness if I am to act out aggressively. [. . .] Like, I was—I get very defensive. And I didn't want to do that. And I was praying, like, "God, if there is a chance that I can jump into this conversation, please, just give me the words to speak [. . .]." It just, it never came. Or the opportunity came and I didn't see it.

Austin clearly takes Chris's comment personally, but the risk he senses in discussing such a volatile topic shapes his understanding of how his evangelical identity should (not) emerge in his FYW course. His "self-censorship" (Marsden 13) stems from his "hyperawareness of context" (Carter 577): he's not blind to the social codes of his academic context and is well aware that speaking as an evangelical may not be "a

great idea" in his FYW course. But as a first-year student in a new academic setting, Austin had yet to invent a way of speaking that would reflect his evangelical identity *and* allow him to identify with a non-Christian audience. He doesn't give up on the matter. Rather, he uses his persuasive research essay to respond to Chris in a manner appropriate for his audience yet true to his evangelical identity. In "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools," Austin attempts to render his faith in academic terms for an audience that does not share his beliefs.

## Austin's Writing and Sense of Self

In our third interview, Austin said, "When writers are presented with topics that they can relate to—really identify with—you get more of who the writer is, and not this fake writer, who's, like, just writing because they have to [. . .]." Being "trained to write a certain way," he said, amounts to "go[ing] through the steps" and thus negates "who the writer is." In Austin's estimation, then, writing academically can represent a kind of "exercise" (Ivanič 222) that does not align well with his conception of self. This disinterested attitude manifests itself when the topic doesn't bear any relation to his identity. What does align with his sense of self, though, are the times when he is able to write about topics that interest him: "[W]hen I write stuff about, like, God and Jesus, it just comes from me. It's [. . .] not something I have to force." This is when he feels his "true colors come out."

Expressing personal devotion came naturally to Austin. Prior to our first interview, he wrote a poem called "Break the Silence" that he was eager to share with me:

> I'm dying to stand in this silence
> And proclaim the love that is [flowing] through me
> My heart beats for You
> Lord shine Your light so all can see
> That You are the Alpha and Omega
> The beginning and the end

Later in the poem, Austin observes, "Lord You're the only one that can save them / For it was your love that saved me from death." He then inserts himself in the Christian narrative of guilt and redemption. "I was the leader," Austin writes,

> I was the one you looked at and said be gone Satan
> And you still died for me
> I was the one that denied You
> I was the one that betrayed You
> Yet you still hung from that cross
> Pleading for me

He concludes the poem with a prayer that highlights his evangelicalism: "Abba, my Father, forever use my voice for those around me / Let it ring with the beauty of

Your love." In writing from the "I," placing himself within Christ's passion story, and praying that his voice would "ring with the beauty of [God's] love," Austin is clearly "living inside the Bible" (Carter 576).

Austin shared this poem with me because he felt it expressed his true identity—it's the kind of writing he feels flows out of him spontaneously, demonstrates his "true colors," and doesn't need to be forced. As such, the subject position Austin comfortably inhabits is one of evangelical commitment and devotion. But if this is where Austin feels most "at home" when it comes to writing, then writing academically about his faith may prove problematic. Such devotion could lead to writing that is misplaced, a point Anderson makes in noting that "Cathy's" writing, rife as it was with "the language of the fundamentalist, of the testimonial, of *Guideposts* magazine and Sunday morning television" (19), conflicts with the objective, self-reflective, often ironic stance that many writing instructors privilege in academic writing (26; Downs 42). It can also be inappropriate for an academic readership, resulting in evangelical students not earning a "serious hearing with diverse audiences" (DePalma 237). But if gaining such a hearing means rendering one's faith in terms understandable by an audience that does not share such faith—and if changing the terms one uses to name faith implicates identity, as Ivanič and LeCourt suggest—then writing academically about primary beliefs could change the individual's relationship to faith.

This is precisely what happened to Austin. Before he began writing "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools," Austin anticipated that the experience would be different from prior academic writing he had done. When Austin told me that he was going to pursue writing "Christian Schools" for his FYW course, he noted, "[T]his will be the first paper that I've ever written that's really gonna show, like, what I think and what I believe." Austin believes that writing about Christian schools and about "God and Jesus" will allow him to tap into his evangelical identity and thus show his "real self" in his academic writing. And, to an extent, it did. As he quickly discovered, though, negotiating his identity as an evangelical writing academically proved more difficult than he had anticipated.

## "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools"

From the outset of Austin's essay, it is apparent that he is attempting to align himself with the values, beliefs, and practices traditionally associated with academic discourse (Ivanič 109). Austin has carefully considered his audience's perspectives, but his goal is clearly that of persuading them to view Christian schools as beneficial. As such, he's arguing in a "traditional" sense (Knoblauch 248). Austin introduces his topic in objective, impersonal terms: "Throughout the history of the United States, Christianity in schools has been a significant part of its culture. However, during the past century, it has dwindled from the public school system." He goes on to say

that "privately run Christian schools" were developed in response to the diminishing influence of Christianity in public education. By the end of his first paragraph, Austin offers his thesis: "Many argue that attending a Christian school takes away from an education, but because they are private learning [institutions], they are able to provide a stronger education while also teaching morals that students are able to apply to their lives outside of the classroom." Austin's objective voice, inclusion of a thesis statement, and use of subordination and third person all signal that he is enacting academic discourse.

Austin mostly maintains this objective stance. He assiduously avoids the use of "I," and the personal experience he does incorporate comes by way of interviews he conducted with peers who had attended Christian schools. There are moments, however, when his language exposes his evangelical identity. Such "Christianese" emerges as early as the second paragraph, where Austin notes that homeroom at a Christian school usually includes a time of prayer during which students "lift up their days to God." And prior to meals or athletic events, "teachers and students ask for God's blessing on the food" while "coaches and teams pray for God to strengthen them and for Him to receive the glory whether they win or lose." Though Austin is reporting on one of the key differences between Christian and public schools, the fact that he does not attribute this language to another source or convey it using scare quotes suggests that he identifies with it (Ivanič 190, 232).

Austin's first argument is largely economic: Christian schools are private, have good student-to-teacher ratios, and thus prepare students for college better than public schools do. Austin likely placed this argument first to accommodate his audience, who values academic success and fears that religious "brainwashing" might hinder it. If Austin can convince his readers that Christian schools help students succeed, perhaps they will be more likely to accept the faith-based perspective promoted by such schools. Austin's consideration of his audience also emerges in his decision to refute criticisms that have been leveled against Christian schools. One criticism he tackles is that Christian schools fail to teach alternative perspectives. He contends that they do teach competing views, including "the theory of evolution, the Big Bang theory, alternate religions, and secular views on Christian principles." To support his argument, Austin cites a fellow student who had attended a Christian school prior to attending the same university. Austin notes "that she was not only taught alternate theories to creation, but also exposed to the philosophy of other world religions." Such an argument matches Austin's motives, which he made clear to me in our second interview: "[I]t would be a good idea if [Christians] were to know [. . .] other sides of the argument. 'Cuz we're always told our side of the argument, and then all these other people are being taught both sides, and then we come out and just get absolutely torn apart."

But although Christian schools teach "evolution" and "world religions," Austin makes it clear that such perspectives are "not taught as truth" and "are always presented in a way that agrees with the Bible," qualifications that provide insight into his epistemological stance: while multiple perspectives exist, Christianity, along with its belief in the authority of the Bible, represents Truth, the perspective through which others must be filtered. Austin made a similar point in our fourth interview:

> You'll be taught everything you would in an evolution class, but they're saying, but this is just a theory. We do not—we do not teach this as truth. We do not believe this. And then you go to your Bible class and your apologetics class and it says, this is what we believe. This is how the world was made.

In Perry's scheme, such thinking corresponds to multiplicity pre-legitimate, the position wherein a "student assimilates" perspectives other than his own into a dualistic frame, "with a minimal accommodation requiring no change in his own stand as loyal Adherent to Authority" (78). From this vantage, students "are aware that other people come to different conclusions," but "the overriding expectation of dualism" is that "one answer must be right" while "all others [are] wrong" (81). By making it clear that Christianity is correct while perspectives such as evolution and non-Christian religions are wrong, Austin acknowledges that he doesn't accord "epistemological legitimacy" to such views (Perry 88). While Christian schools teach "evolution" and "world religions," Austin makes it clear in "Christian Schools vs. Public Schools" that such perspectives are "not taught as truth" and "are always presented in a way that agrees with the Bible." Austin agrees that multiple perspectives exist, but they are illegitimate or false when compared with the truth of Christianity.

Austin's purpose was to pique his readers' curiosity about faith by persuading them that Christian schools are beneficial. As Austin put it in our fourth interview, "I'm trying to convey [my ideas] in a way that people are gonna read this and be like, 'Wow, I wish I had gone to Christian school.' And like, 'Oh, [. . .] what's this relationship with God he's talking about?'" Achieving his purposes proved more challenging than Austin had imagined. Early in his drafting process, Austin confessed that the writing had been "a lot different" from what he'd anticipated: "I thought it would be kinda like what I had written on my own, like, the poems that I had written. [. . .] Trying to write this has been much more difficult than I thought." And at the end of our fourth interview (which took place the day before the paper was due), Austin highlighted the conflict he sensed: "I almost feel everything I said in that last interview I've totally contradicted with this right now. I said, 'Oh, yes I think it'll be easy, really good to write about this paper.' And now I'm here saying, 'It's so hard! I can barely write this!'"

Austin's difficulties with invention—in his words, "finding coherent points to

say why Christian schools are better [than public schools]"—stemmed from questions of identity:

> It's really hard because right now I feel like the things I'm saying in my paper are really watered down, and I don't want to do that. [. . .] I want to put, like, me in this paper [. . .]. I want you guys to see, like, the love of Christ in me. I really, I love Christian schools because they teach this, but because you don't believe it, it's really hard to get that across to people. You know? [. . . T]hat's just the hardest part about it, is writing it for non-Christians. I was telling this to [my professor], saying, I want, I could go into really deep spiritual, theological things here, but I feel that that would really detract from my argument. Because [. . .] people would automatically say, "That's not true."

One senses the frustration Austin experienced in communicating with an audience that did not share his beliefs and values. Much of that frustration stems from the fact that Austin wants to convey his "desired self," one that accords with his identity as an evangelical, but he fears that "go[ing] into really deep spiritual, theological things" might hinder his argument. What is available to him, given the circumstances, is an argument that doesn't fully accord with his identity, one that he senses is "watered down." To "strengthen" his argument and identify as an evangelical in his academic writing, Austin cites the Bible, a rhetorical move that ironically undercuts one of his core evangelical beliefs.

## Joshua 24:15 and the Freedom of Choice

Austin spoke on several occasions about his desire to cite the Bible, which he felt "would bring a lot of weight to my paper. Because it's saying, like, this is what's in the Bible, and this is what Christian schools are doing, or—something along those lines. I'm not sure how I'm going to incorporate it." Austin believes that citing the Bible "would bring [. . .] weight" to his paper not because it is appropriate for his audience, but because it represents absolute truth. As he put it in our second interview, "What I believe is that the Bible is God-inspired, even though it's gone through hundreds of translations, God has facilitated all of that. God would not let his word be altered." Austin's motives to cite the Bible are thus more dualistic than rhetorical. As such, while Austin's attitude toward school certainly differs from Rob Campbell's, his assumption of authority regarding the Bible is similar. As noted earlier, Austin learned at his Christian school that the Bible helps separate true perspectives from false. For Austin, then, citing the Bible helps assuage his fear that he's watering down his argument while allowing him to draw on a value he possibly shares with his non-Christian audience.

The verse Austin cites comes from the Old Testament book of Joshua and appears late in his paper:

> In the Bible, it states that it is in your own free will that you choose to believe or not believe in God's Word. In the book of Joshua in the Old Testament of the Bible, Joshua, one of the leaders of the Israelites at around 1200 B.C., states, "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (The Holy Bible, Joshua 24.15). As said in the Bible, God does not force people into believing in what He says. Since Christian schools are based upon the Bible they should follow the same criteria and not force these ideas on their students.

The manner in which he introduces Joshua 24:15 suggests that Austin understands that his readers may not know that Joshua appears in the Old Testament. But his audience awareness is evidenced more significantly by the principle he extracts from the verse, namely free will. The warrant underlying Austin's argument in this paragraph could be stated as follows: *People ought to be free to choose what they believe*, or *It is bad to force people to believe something*. The value he promotes is one he knows would have traction with Chris and other non-Christian readers who suspect that Christian schools brainwash their students.

And, to an extent, Austin also shares this belief. In our first interview, he noted that neither God nor his parents had forced him to adopt Christianity, arguing instead that free will is God-given. In a later interview, Austin said the following:

> God doesn't force us to believe. [. . . I]t's almost naturally, when we're told to believe something, told to do something, we don't want to do it. But because my parents were very—they let me figure out my own faith. And I found Jesus on my own. Like, my parents were very encouraging.

Austin attributes a similar kind of freedom of belief to his experience attending a Christian school, where faith "was never forced on us." Even in his Bible classes, "people weren't shoving down, like, 'Oh, you, if you're not a Christian, you're not good enough.'" But Austin's emphasis on freedom of choice is held in tension by another motive, namely the desire to see all of humanity come to know Jesus Christ as savior, a desire that stems from his belief that Christianity is universally true. Austin articulated his passion for this belief in our first interview when he noted that Christians need "to be praying for those who don't know Him, and just knowing that if they aren't saved, they are going to the worst place imaginable"—a fate Austin doesn't "want to see [. . .] happen to anybody."

Austin's evangelical ideal is all the more important given his public university context. During our first interview, Austin reflected on the evangelism conference he had attended recently: "We just came back to campus just so on fire to go and just tell everyone on campus. Like, being bold about Jesus." In reference to the party atmosphere on campus, he also noted "how much" he believes his "campus needs Jesus." And in our third interview, Austin said, "I want to reach the people who don't know Christ. We can't give up. We can't stop, like, reaching to the lost. [. . .]

Because that's what God calls us to do—make disciples of all nations." Austin's evangelical assumption is something like *People need to believe in Christ in order to be saved*, or *Christianity is the one right way*—a different warrant from the one that undergirds his citation of Joshua 24:15. With either warrant, individuals have options: they can choose to believe or not believe. The difference is that although the warrant underlying his citation of Joshua 24:15 offers options that are equally legitimate, the warrant that undergirds his evangelical identity marks one choice as right and all others as wrong.

By citing Joshua 24:15 the way he does, Austin appeals to one of his audience's values while also engaging in a practice that aligns with his evangelical identity. Too, the value to which Austin appeals is one that he and his audience partially share—that it's not good to be forced into believing anything. Thus there's something rhetorically savvy about Austin's citation of Joshua 24:15. By inviting his readers to see the value of free will through a biblical lens, Austin offers them space to identify with a sacred text that encompasses much of the authority of Christian tradition and his own evangelicalism. From a rhetorical perspective, then, his approach to citing the Bible differs from other examples in composition scholarship: Rob Campbell's "testimonial" approach to academic writing involves using "the text or the world to illustrate" the truth he already knows (Hunt 127), yet Austin gives careful thought to his audience, considering their values in relation to his own. Austin is certainly attempting to fulfill "the function of the composition classroom," which is, in Carter's words, "to enable [students] to speak to readers who do not [. . .] 'live inside the Book'" (578).

But given that Austin's audience does not share his belief that Christianity represents absolute truth, to what extent *is* Austin appealing to a common value? Does Joshua 24:15 forward the same principle that Austin purports to draw on, and how does it match up to his evangelical belief that salvation comes solely through Christ? Joshua 24:15 is part of a larger story wherein Joshua convinces the tribes of Israel to abandon the many gods they had worshipped in Egypt and turn back to Yahweh alone. Joshua tells this by recounting significant moments when God aided the Israelites—leading Abraham to the land of Canaan, sending Moses and Aaron to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, helping them defeat various enemies, and so forth. Joshua speaks for God, preceding his narration with, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says" (*NIV*, Josh. 24:2). The recitation of significant events is wrapped in quotation marks; the "I" that speaks is Yahweh speaking through Joshua.

Austin omits the entirety of Joshua's declaration:

> Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods

> of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. (24:14–15)

Joshua's command to follow the Lord and abandon other gods ends with his own family's declaration that they will serve Yahweh. As the Israelite leader who had just spoken for God, Joshua has significant ethos. Declaring that he and his family *will* serve Yahweh indicates he wasn't as much offering a choice as telling his audience that they *should* choose to serve God, an imperative reflected by Joshua's commands to "fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness" and "[t]hrow away" other gods. By speaking as Yahweh, Joshua stacks the deck against choosing not to believe. Joshua wasn't actually offering a choice. In fact, Joshua's audience unanimously agreed to serve and obey Yahweh, a decision later sealed by a covenant (see Josh. 24:16–27).

And that's the rub. There's a significant difference between the kind of choice that Joshua 24:15 offers—a choice that parallels Austin's belief in Christianity as absolute truth—and the choice that Austin promotes for his non-Christian audience. In Burke's terms, Austin has casuistically stretched his original principle (that Christianity is true and that all people need to accept Christ to be saved) to accommodate his audience's value (that people should be free to choose to believe what they will, and it's okay for people not to choose Christianity). Though his casuistic stretching may not quite represent what Burke would call a "perversion of casuistry" (*Rhetoric* 154), the difference between "one should choose to serve God" and "one has the freedom to choose" is significant. It's as if Austin is admitting that it's okay *not* to choose to serve God, that maybe such a position is as legitimate as his belief that people *need* to choose to serve God to escape damnation. In casuistically stretching Joshua 24:15, Austin subordinates one of his core evangelical beliefs to his audience's pluralistic perspective. And in owning this perspective in his writing, he opens the door for interiorizing the belief that multiple perspectives are legitimate—that Christianity is one option among many.

To be sure, Austin was beginning to confront relativism prior to writing his "Christian Schools" essay. In our first few interviews, Austin hinted at the tension he sensed between his belief that Christianity is universal and his understanding that others, including his non-Christian audience, might reject such a claim. While talking about the process of writing "Christian Schools" in his fourth interview, for instance, Austin said, "[T]his is what I believe to be true, and what is true. And that's what I'm really struggling to do right now with my paper because I don't want to sound like [. . .] those Bible-thumping Christians who turn people away from Christianity." Notice the shift from "what *I* believe to be true" to "what *is* true." Evangelical theologian Lesslie Newbigin explains the significance of such a shift when he ventriloquizes a postmodern perspective with which he disagrees: "Opinions about how [reality] *ought* to function can only be personal opinions, and any assertion that the purpose

for which human life exists has in fact been revealed by the One whose purpose it is, is treated as unacceptable dogmatism" (18). This perspective, Newbigin argues, "insists that truth claims about God and about the nature and destiny of humankind must be in the form 'This is true for me,' not in the form 'This is true'" (19). Austin's statement just quoted suggests that he intuits this distinction: as soon as he makes a personal comment ("This is true for me"), he reframes it in universal terms ("This is true"). But appealing to such universality then leads him to the question of what he calls "force" in his Joshua 24:15 paragraph: he feared that if he made an argument about Christianity as absolute truth, he would "sound like [. . .] those Bible-thumping Christians who turn people away from Christianity." He's straddling the epistemological divide between absolute truth and pluralism, uncertain of how exactly to identify and without a framework to name the consequences.

Given Austin's epistemological uncertainty, his casuistic stretching of Joshua 24:15 is all the more significant; in Sánchez's terms, it represents a "moment of inscription" (244) wherein Austin constructs a discoursal identity that corresponds more closely to relativism than dualism. Such an act of writing by no means entails loss of faith: the demoralization that Burke identifies as a result of casuistic stretching is neither demolition nor abandonment of one's original principle, and one of the hallmarks of Christian tradition is the idea that wholeness comes from brokenness—that something new can come from what has been disrupted.[2] But demoralization does represent movement away from the original principle, and the fact that Austin has aligned himself discursively with a value that conflicts with his evangelical identity suggests the possibility that he may eventually interiorize his audience's pluralism. If LeCourt is right when she argues that "[o]ur rhetorics of identity [. . .] *are* us" (31), then aligning his discoursal self with pluralism suggests that Austin's autobiographical self may follow suit. At the least, it indicates that Austin has taken a step toward seeing pluralism as legitimate. Casuistically stretching Joshua 24:15 has "open[ed] a path toward doubt" regarding Austin's belief in Christianity as absolute truth (Perry 88).

## Conclusion

After completing his essay, Austin was ambivalent toward it. "I hope it's okay," he said in our fifth interview. "I thought, like, it was okay written. I felt good about it. But I'm not gonna say, 'Oh, it was an awesome paper.'" Part of Austin's ambivalence stemmed from not yet knowing his grade, but much of it centered on his experience writing "Christian Schools":

> I just see the struggles I went through in writing my paper. How frustrated I was while I was writing this, and I know where I was when I said this stuff. I really feel like God just spoke through me and was able to just voice what I wanted to say in a way that would be the most effective.

". . . *God just spoke through me* . . . ." It's a distinctly evangelical phrase because it subsumes the agency of the individual within a larger divine purpose. It also echoes the line in Austin's poem where he prays, "Abba, my Father, forever use my voice for those around me." More important, it suggests that Austin is unaware that he has aligned himself with a perspective that conflicts with his evangelicalism. Ironically, although Joshua 24:15 depicts God as speaking through Joshua, Austin's use of the verse is polyvocal: God may have spoken through him, but so did the pluralism of his audience. While Austin does align himself discursively with his evangelical identity via biblical citation, he also "appropriates" his audience's values in ways that complicate his evangelical belief (Ivanič 245). And constructing a discoursal identity as such makes it possible for Austin to reenvision his evangelical identity in pluralistic terms.

But if Carter is right that pluralism is the goal of FYW courses, then isn't Austin's move toward pluralism a good thing? On the one hand, yes. Austin, unlike some evangelical FYW students discussed in composition scholarship, is able to think rhetorically even as he cites the Bible in his academic writing. He's able to communicate many of his faith-based ideals to an audience that doesn't share them, aligning him more with Carter's Keneshia or DePalma's Thomas than with Hunt's Rob. And that's certainly a good thing. But Austin's casuistic stretching of Joshua 24:15 brings into question his agency. Ivanič and Daniell both locate agency in a writer's ability to choose which values to accommodate or reject. Though Austin certainly does make careful choices about how best to craft his argument for his audience, he remains unaware of the extent to which casuistically stretching Joshua 24:15 aligns him with a perspective that conflicts with his evangelical view of truth. When I asked him in our final interview if he saw writing academically as shaping his faith, he turned the influence in the other direction: "Um, maybe a little bit more so the other way. But I would say it's not, like, affecting it—it's not making me compromise anything." Austin later reiterated that he had never "been in a class" that made him "compromise [his] faith." Moreover, in the letter he wrote prior to our final interview—a letter in which I asked him to consider how he saw his education as shaping his faith and vice versa—Austin wrote, "The most important element I got out [of writing "Christian Schools"] was a refresher course on how [I] need to glorify God in everything I do, which means giving 100% of my efforts towards what I am doing."

Austin's interpretation of his difficulty writing "Christian Schools," then, is that it helped strengthen his faith. Thus "the Absolute remains secure and close at hand" (Perry 87–88). And while it could be argued that this indicates he has been able to think rhetorically *and* maintain his evangelical identity, I'm bothered by the simplicity of Austin's interpretation. I'm bothered that he doesn't seem to be confronting the dilemma he bumped up against in his writing, that his Christian perspective might be one among many. I'm bothered that he isn't able to see the "cost" that writing academically can "exact" on his own "privately intuited, epistemological

registries" (Smart 21). In short, I'm bothered that Austin saw his faith as influencing his education but not the opposite—that writing academically could shape his faith or complicate his beliefs. To be sure, Austin said nothing in our fifth interview that suggested the discoursal identity he established in "Christian Schools" had shaped his autobiographical identity—that the terms he had adopted for naming his faith had shaped his social self. But demoralization from an original principle occurs over time, not immediately; dualism "is first modified and loosened by a series of accommodations necessitated by its assimilation of the pluralism of both peer group and curriculum" (Perry 61). Because it represents a discursive encounter with "the pluralism of both peer group and curriculum," Austin's casuistic stretching of Joshua 24:15 can be read as an early step in "a series of accommodations" toward adopting a more pluralistic perspective.

Earlier, I cited Barrett's observation that "many faith-centered students" in the public university will have their faiths challenged regardless of their writing instructors' motives or pedagogy; writing teachers thus need to be "aware of some consequences of our pedagogies" for such students (149). I agree. I also agree that, as writing instructors, we should develop pedagogies that challenge our students to think critically and rhetorically. But we can do so in ways that afford our religiously committed students the agency to "decide how far they will be true to themselves in appropriating [their readers'] values and meeting [their] expectations" (Ivanič 245). Toward that end, I would like to close by considering the implications of this case study for future scholarship and pedagogy.

I noted earlier that scholarship such as DePalma's and Carter's seeks to value students' evangelical identities as part of the academic enterprise. Although I wholeheartedly share DePalma's and Carter's goals, Austin's experience demands that we extend the questions that motivate such research. In addition to asking how we might value students' evangelical identities and literacies to help them engage productively within academic discourse, we also must interrogate the discoursal and autobiographical identity consequences of doing so. Austin certainly provides insight into one possible consequence of writing academically for an audience of readers that doesn't share his faith, namely that it nudges him—discursively, at least—toward seeing his faith as one perspective among many. But Austin's experience surely cannot be generalized to all evangelicals at public universities, much less to students of other denominations or faiths. Much more research is needed if compositionists are to develop a fuller understanding of the identity consequences of integrating faith into academic writing. Further case study research undoubtedly could provide more insight into such students' experiences, particularly in terms of their awareness about how they are constructing their arguments, in what ways they are identifying discursively, and with which beliefs they are aligning themselves. Like the present study, such research could involve interviews and textual analysis of student writing. But

whereas Austin's case study considered one common discursive practice associated with evangelical students—biblical citation—future studies could explore other ways through which evangelicals integrate their faith into academic writing. Toward this end, formulating a list of discursive features similar to what Brad Peters provides in his discussion of African American sermonic discourse could go a long way toward helping writing instructors know when, how, and for what ends evangelicals are integrating their faith into academic writing (see Peters 129).

We also need longer-term research into the consequences that writing academically might have on students' faith-based identities. Here, I must admit that I lost touch with Austin after I moved to a different university in 2009. Thus I don't know if he changed positions on Perry's scheme—if his discursive embrace of pluralism translated to his autobiographical self. This lack of a long-term methodology is certainly a limitation in my study, but it also highlights a gap in our scholarship: although composition studies has several longitudinal studies that focus on questions of transfer and writing development—Lee Ann Carroll's *Rehearsing New Roles* and Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* are two examples—few long-term studies focus on identity and writing, much less evangelical identity in writing. Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis's *Persons in Process* comes closest by following "Nam," a devout Catholic of Vietnamese descent, over his first year in college (he matriculated to seminary the next year). Although longitudinal studies are certainly difficult to conduct, such research could help compositionists answer key questions: *What long-term implications might writing academically have on students' faith-based identities? How and when does constructing a discoursal identity influence that individual's autobiographical identity? What possibilities for identity exist other than loss-of-faith narratives like Barrett's?*

Studies such as these could provide writing instructors with key insights into helping students like Austin understand the identity implications of academic writing. Certainly, Austin's experience provides writing instructors with possible questions to raise when a student wants to cite a sacred text in academic writing: *Toward what end do you want to cite this text? What value or belief does the passage invoke? How does that value or belief match up with your rhetorical goals for citing the text?* Similarly, writing instructors who teach someone like Austin—a devout evangelical who, similar to DePalma's Thomas, seeks to think rhetorically and engage productively in academic discourse—would do well to engage such students in conversations about their beliefs, particularly in terms of how such beliefs become imbricated in traditional, required persuasive essays. Helping students interrogate how their beliefs overlap and conflict with those of their audience would be key. Questions to prompt such discussions might include: *What are your beliefs as an evangelical regarding this issue? How are they similar to and different from your audience's? Which of your audience's beliefs, if any, would you be willing to accommodate? Which beliefs would you be unwilling to accommodate? Which beliefs are central to your sense of self?* Such conversations would need to be rigorous

and nuanced: Austin, for instance, seemed to understand freedom of choice vaguely enough that he sensed he could align his evangelical perspective with his audience's pluralism. He needed guidance to see the distinction between the belief he held as an evangelical and the pluralistic belief with which he aligned himself.

One way to engage students in such nuanced exploration of their own beliefs could come via an adaptation of a common assignment in FYW courses: the rhetorical analysis. Because teaching argument is a staple of FYW courses—and because such assignments are often taught with a focus on audience—instructors could ask students to analyze their own arguments, particularly in terms of logos, the "cultural assumptions and values" underlying an argument (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz 87). This would demand that students think critically and deeply about how arguments are made at the level of belief. If students were asked to analyze their *own* arguments—or perhaps their own views on a particular topic—they could answer questions such as the following: *On what beliefs, values, or cultural assumptions am I premising my argument? And how do such premises match up with the deeply held beliefs that correspond to my desired self?* Helping students engage in the kind of thinking that would enable them to choose how they identify in their writing—the kind of thinking that fosters agency—would be the goal of such an exercise.

Indeed, Austin's experience suggests that discussions about identity and writing should be more explicit in FYW courses, both with students of faith and with those who align with no faith tradition. Such discussions would be particularly important for assignments in which students are expected to make an argument, especially when their audience holds beliefs different from their own. At the end of her essay, Knoblauch writes, "[A]s we attempt to help students negotiate differences, both within the classroom and in the larger social realm, we do them a disservice if we limit definitions and practices of argument [. . .] solely to conversion and an intent to persuade" (263). I certainly agree, but I also contend that we do students a disservice if we fail to talk with them about how making arguments can implicate their beliefs and identities. Prior to writing "Christian Schools," for instance, Austin felt that writing about a topic related to his faith would allow him to express his evangelical perspective. Though this was partially true, Austin would have benefited from knowing that expressing deeply held beliefs well—that is to say, rhetorically—likely entails bumping up against significant questions regarding faith and identity, especially in the context of an FYW course at a public university. Of course we want to help students identify with diverse audiences, and it would be misguided to imagine that our students could completely separate their deeply held beliefs from academic writing that matters. But making the potential identity consequences of academic writing explicit to our students—helping them see ways in which their beliefs and identities converge and conflict with their arguments and audiences—would help students achieve agency and thus make more informed rhetorical choices.

And I don't think it's too much of a stretch to argue that talking with students about the identity consequences of academic writing could help them reach Perry's ultimate stage of development: commitment in relativism. In his conclusion, Perry notes that several students involved in his study praised the interview process: "Every student should have an interview each year like this" (214). While Perry warns against taking this comment literally, he also sees in it evidence that students were "hungering for a nutriment essential to growth" that was only "meagerly supplied" in then-contemporary education (214). Although today's pedagogies clearly differ from those of the 1950s and 1960s, perhaps it is possible to read in such comments a desire to make such issues explicit—to have a forum for talking through the belief and identity challenges that result from encounters with pluralism. Austin at least hinted at this when, in his last interview, he told me that "[b]eing able to verbalize this stuff [. . .] helped [him] a lot." Perhaps when we help students understand the identity implications associated with writing academically for diverse audiences, we also help them achieve the agency to negotiate such challenges effectively and arrive at a place of commitment.

## Notes

1. "Austin" is a pseudonym.
2. I am grateful to Elizabeth Vander Lei for reminding me of this point.

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