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2 Exploring a Faith-Led Open-Systems Perspective of Stewardship 3 in Family Businesses

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to examine how faith-led practices in family firms affect organizational stewardship. Current studies highlight the relevance of religious adherence for family businesses, yet provide limited understanding of how this shapes the key traits of these organizations. Drawing on six autobiographies of family business leaders who openly express their adherence to their faith, and adopting an open-systems analysis of these autobiographies, we demonstrate that faith-led values influence organizational and leadership practices. Overall, our study suggests that the influence of religious beliefs in the organizational practices of family businesses have greater repercussions than previously thought. By introducing a faith-led approach to stewardship, we enrich the theoretical discussion around stewardship and the relevance of religion in family business.

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Keywords Spiritual open-systems · Stewardship · Family business · Organizational practices · Extended kinship network · Faith-led business

18 Introduction

stewardship climate than their non-family counterparts, fostering employee engagement with policies, practices, and

The role of religion as one dimension of stewardship relies procedures, adopting pro-organizational values (Neubaum et al. 2017), and affecting the governance of these firms, thereby, and Miller 2018, p. 233), influencing multiple areas of the Family businesses are a unique context characterized by family business. Stewardship theory assumes a relationship-based system with a focus on non-financial goals, individual and family systems

generosity, sacrifice, and discipline” (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2017), and affecting the governance of these firms, thereby, and Miller 2018, p. 233), influencing multiple areas of the Family businesses are a unique context characterized by family business. Stewardship theory assumes a relationship-based system with a focus on non-financial goals, individual and family systems also serving the organizational good (Davis et al. 1997), the in which the daily enactment of work and home are intrinsic desire to pursue collective goals, and relying on often “inextricably intertwined” (Aldrich and Clif 2003; 2741 trust as a control mechanism (Madison et al. 2016). Recent Hamilton 2006; Fletcher 2010). Traditionally, the influence

2012). Family businesses are found to have a stronger

faith-led behaviours hold a position of influence (Weaver

and Agle 2002). Yet, while extensive research has hinted 45 at the

importance of religion in family irms, we still know 46 A1 **Electronic supplementary material** The online version of this little about how and why

A2 article (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04387-2>) contains
A3 supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.

irms change (Wong et al. 2018; Kellermanns 2013), and 48
49 how stewardship relates to faith-led practices within the
50 irm (Dodd and Dyck 2015; Discua Cruz 2013).

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To explore this complex intertwining between 51
52 organizational practices and stewardship, we build on the
53 opensystems perspective of Pieper and Klein (2007). In family
54 irms, family and business subsystems influence each other,
55 shaping the irm’s unique character (Habbershon et al. 2003;

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organizational practices in family 47 56 Litz 2008; Pieper and Klein

2007). We argue that an open- value, identity and long-term commitment to their irm, 106

57 systems methodology, enabling a wider but more detailed enhanced personal reputation through stewardship activities,
107

58 analysis of each subsystem, allows describing how religious and more likely to be inherently moral as a result of shared 108
59 faith can shape organizational practices (Smith-Acuña 2011) cultural values and religious convictions. Thus, family busi- 109

60 and theorizing on its influence on stewardship. nesses are an ideal context to examine the integration of faith 110 61 Due to the
61 exploratory nature of this study, we address a under a stewardship lens. 111

62 broad research question: *How do faith-led practices in fam- The stewardship perspective recognizes that family busi- 112
63 ily firms affect organizational stewardship?* We draw on an ness owners and managers are not always self-serving but 113

64 open-systems framework to help us interpret written auto- align their goals and motivations with those they serve in 114
65 biographies. Recent research has advocated autobiography the whole organization (Davis et al. 2010). Such perspective 115

66 as a source of insights that enable advancing understanding suggests that leaders may develop organizational practices 116
67 of family irms over time (Hjorth and Dawson 2016). Thus, that benefit the family irm when policies foster stewardship 117

68 we empirically draw on six family businesses and their auto- behaviours (Zahra et al. 2008; James et al. 2017). It could 118
69 biographies: Ouimet (Ouimet and Semen 2013), Cardone be argued that committed family leaders and non-family 119

70 (Cardone 2009), Chick-il-A (Cathy 2007), Interstate Batter- employees can achieve this by engaging in constant and 120
71 ies (Miller and Hosier 1996), Hobby Lobby (Green and Mer- positive interactions framed in faith. 121

72 rill 2010), and Mary Kay (Ash and Pendleton 2008). The In this regard, Neubaum et al. (2017, p. 38) introduced 122
73 selected autobiographies help to illustrate how faith shapes the stewardship climate perspective as “the extent to which 123

74 organizational practices in family business and therefore individuals perceive that their irm’s policies, practices, and 124
75 stewardship. procedures foster stewardship behaviours and stewardship 125

76 Our study thus contributes to scholarship by unveiling values, which are widely shared across the organization”. 126
77 how faith affects stewardship in family businesses. Con- The central tenets of stewardship climate are that organi- 127

78 ceptualizing stewardship from the perspective of individu- zations relect the leader’s values, and that steward lead- 128
79 als involved in the family business (Davis et al. 2010), our ers will design and govern their irms to elicit stewardship 129

80 study extends and complements earlier research framing behaviours from others within the organization. Exchanges 130
81 stewardship in the psychological and sociological perspec- between family business stewards and individuals achieve 131 82

82 tives (Henssen et al. 2014; Hernandez 2012; Wade-Benzoni this by creating a situation of reciprocal stewardship that 132
83 et al. 2008). permeates the organization (Neubaum et al. 2017, p. 38). 133

84 The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We Family businesses with a stewardship climate emphasize 134
85 irst discuss stewardship and religion in the family business intrinsic motivation, organizational identiication, use of per- 135

86 context, then introduce the systems perspective to investigate and 136
 87 the organizational practices of faith-led leaders in family 137
 88 businesses. We then explain the methodology, discuss our 138
 89 findings, describe a faith-led family systems model and its 139
 90 implications for stewardship theory. Last, we offer our con- 140
 91 clusions and suggest some future research avenues. sharing the stewardship values across the organization. 141
 Neubaum et al. (2017) call for studies to explore the 142 extent
 to which family firms are likely to be inherently 143 92 **Stewardship and Religion in the Family** moral or inclined to remain
 within the boundaries of moral 144

93 **Business Context** 145
 behaviour as a result of their shared religious convictions. 146 94
 Inspired by Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2018) and Dis- 147 94
 Family businesses are the heartbeat of the global economy cua Cruz (2013, 2018), we observe that among the many 147
 95 and are currently the predominant organizational form 148
 96 around the world (Melin et al. 2014). Researchers agree 149
 AQ4 that one of the key characteristics of family business is that 150
 98 family and business objectives are often difficult to sepa- 151
 99 rate (Astrachan 2003, 2010; Fletcher 2002; Hamilton 2013). 152
 100 Recent studies contend that stewardship practices and behav- 153
 101 iours are more likely to be evident in family than non-family 154
 102 firms (Neubaum et al. 2017; Madison et al. 2016; Dodd and 155
 103 Dyck 2015). Dodd and Dyck (2015) argue that family firms 156
 104 may place greater emphasis on stewardship due to their 157
 105 interpersonal relationships, relational and socioemotional 158
 159 A Christian perspective of stewardship in family firms calls 209
 160 on the owners to look at the business and everything in 210
 161 it from God's perspective according to Biblical scripture 211
 162 (Joshua 24: 15; Leviticus 25: 23; Psalms 50: 10–12; Haggai 212
 163 2: 8; Ecclesiastes 5: 19; James 1: 17, NRSV). In this per- 213
 164 spective, Christians are stewards of the committed resources 214
 165 by the legitimacy and authority of God (Caferky 2012), thus 215
 166 devising organizational practices to ensure the wellbeing of 216
 167 everyone and everything in order to honour God (Deuter- 217
 168 onomy 6: 5, 10: 1; Psalm 22: 23 | Isaiah 42: 12; Luke 12: 218
 169 42-48; Ephesians 4: 28). 219
 170 To believers, God is a legitimate and authoritative guide 220
 171 for behaviour, and an important stakeholder in the decisions 221
 172 made for the firm, its operations, and practices (Schwartz 222
 173 2006), thus adopting organizational practices that make 223
 174 them accountable for their actions to God and the larger 224
 175 community (Discua Cruz 2015). This suggests an emphasis 225
 176 on servant-like leadership, trust, and vocation (Smith 2005; 226
 177 Rossouw 1994; Caferky 2012), and the relevance of a sys- 227 178
 tems view in the stewardship perspective (Neubaum et al. scholars to explore many aspects and key features of family 228

businesses (Kepner 1983), including organizational culture (Martins and Terblanche 2003), relational communication (Schlippe and Frank 2013), and wealth creation (Habbershon

180 A Systems Perspective on Organizational

et al. 2003). 232

181 **Practices of Faith-Led Family Businesses** Kepner (1983) highlights the importance of developing our understanding of the interaction between the family sub- 234 182 A key feature of family businesses is that they reflect the idiosyncratic system and the firm's development. Building on this perspective

183 osyncratic views of families that often have religious beliefs perspective can contribute to our understanding of stewardship 236

184 that may influence the organizational context, and hence the way in a faith-led family firm where the relationship with God 237

185 way the firm operates or pursues its objectives over time is integral. Schlippe and Frank (2013, p. 387) argue that a 238

186 (Paterson et al. 2013). Family businesses must develop systems approach enables considering the nuanced interac- 239

187 practices that allow members to work together to achieve tion between the "individual, subsystems, family business 240

188 their goals and objectives, and interact with external actors. and environment". These studies highlight an arrangement 241

189 Compared to other types of firms, family businesses may of elements in family firms that are interdependent and inter- 242

190 derive their organizational practices from the interaction connected to form a purposeful whole. 243

191 between the family and the business subsystems (Kepner Pieper and Klein (2007), based on a comprehensive 244

192 1983). Organizational practices express the way businesses review of systems theory, propose four structural areas 245

193 pursue their objectives, the shared routines and knowledge of a family business system. First, the *family* subsystem, 246

194 that support the provision of products and services, allowing which aims to explore the influence of individual beliefs 247

195 the members to meet their customers' needs (Beatson et al. on relationship-building and organizational practices with 248

196 2008). The long-term perspective that tends to characterize extended networks of employees, customers, competitors, 249

197 family firms encourages the development of organizational suppliers, and other stakeholders. Second, the *business*, 250

198 practices as part of a survival strategy implicitly influenced described as an "organization that processes inputs from 251

199 by the values, objectives, and beliefs held by family mem- the environment and returns some product or service" 252

200 bers (Lumpkin and Brigham 2011; Sorenson 2013). (Pieper and Klein 2007, p. 306). Third, *ownership* struc- 253

201 Several studies have identified and lauded the existence tures that consider legal and psychological dimensions, as 254

202 of Christian owned and operated businesses (Chan-Serain well as voting infrastructure and/or firm capital. Last, the 255

203 et al. 2012; Wong et al. 2018). One of the most comprehen- *management* subsystem encompasses the top management 256

204 sive definitions of a business that aims to uphold the Chris- team leadership, and relationships between employees and 257

205 tian faith is one that "declare[s] their belief in, and active managers, which may be guided by stewardship behaviours. 258

206 pursuit of, the successful merging of biblical principles These systems are the means by which value is created and 259

207 with business activities" (Ibrahim and Angelidis 2005, p. delivered to stakeholders. We build on Pieper and Klein's 260

208 187). A Christian emphasis in organizations may imply that (2007) conceptualization of an open-systems approach to 261

262 investigate how the faith-centred stewardship perspective In addition, we also took note of possible "correspondence 311

263 of an individual leader affects the business structure and bias" whereby family business leaders attribute success to 312

264 practices. We consider this in the context of the environment internal rather than external causes (Mathias and Smith 313

265 in which the family business exists and operates, drawing 2016). In this regard, for triangulation and contextualization, 314

266 on the perspective of God as the managerial stakeholder we complemented the use of autobiographies with additional 315

267 or ultimate CEO (Schwartz 2006, p. 292). We argue that data (see Table 1). Furthermore, we remained vigilant to the 316

268 the individual's belief in the family as part of the family of possibility of social desirability bias where autobiographies 317

269 God is embedded in the family subsystem. Consequently, are written in a manner that will be viewed favourably by 318

270 a faith-led family approach influences the organizational others (Mathias and Smith 2016). Consequently, we were 319 271

behaviours and structures of the day-to-day stewardship of mindful of the interpretation limitations associated with 320

272 faith-led family businesses. social desirability and the influence on the nature of the 321

273 Few mainstream perspectives adopt such a nuanced claims made. In sum, we borrow from Goss et al. (2011, 322
 274 method to understand the complex layers of a family busi- p. 218) who state that, “any such problems are outweighed 323
 275 ness system influenced by faith-led stewardship behaviours by the advantages that this material offers in terms of depth 324
 276 and relationships. This is especially important when examin- and duration”. 325
 277 ing the influence that faith has on the owner-manager, and
 278 consequently the way in which the family business operates **Sampling** 326
 279 over time.

Our sampling strategy was purposeful and intrinsically 327 linked
 to our research question (Patton 2002). While numer- 328

280 **Methodology** ous studies consider the topic of faith and work (Gundolf 329 and Filser 2013; Ewest 2015), less has been
 published on 330

281 **Research Design** the enactment of individual and organizational spirituality as 331 part of stewardship in family businesses.
 We therefore began 332 282 Seeking to capture in-depth personal data illustrating the by gathering a worldwide list of resources
 associated with 333

283 complex and diverse relationships between spirituality, own- the topics of religion, spirituality, and family business. One 334
 284 ership, and organizational enactment, we rely on written nar- of our main concerns was identifying family businesses
 that 335

285 ratives in the form of autobiographies. Autobiographies are were openly Christian, made their Christian faith public, and 336
 286 distinct from biographies as they rely on primary data to pronounced that faith was part of their leadership, manage- 337
 287 develop insights on the origins of ideas (Ford et al. 2003), rial practices, and decision-making processes. We worked 338

288 such as the leader’s vocation, the challenges of translating through many manuscripts distinguishing family business 339 289
 this vocation into organizational practices, and the successes cases from others, which led us to identify six Christian fam- 340
 290 and failures of their approach. Autobiographies can be use- ily businesses in America. 341

291 ful to understand family business, as they “shed light on the We believe our sample of cases is appropriate due to the 342
 292 relational dynamics of how family and business, as well as diversity and detailed accounts of successful and unsuccess- 343
 293 family members, are inextricably interconnected” (Dawson ful practices. Our cases also include an enhanced, some- 344

294 and Hjorth 2012, p. 350). Following earlier work drawing times even intimate degree of personal and deep relections 345
 295 on autobiographies (Dawson and Hjorth 2012), our research (Boyle and Parry 2007) that underpin our theoretical nar- 346
 296 design enabled collecting rich, personal data from a num- rative in relation to stewardship. Finally, by presenting rich 347 297

ber of individuals with different backgrounds and religious data from a diverse sample of diferent industries and reli- 348
 298 vocations. gious backgrounds, we contribute with a conceptualization 349

299 Whilst we accept that relying on autobiographical that is richer and more accepting of religious and spiritual 350
 300 accounts is a particular and somewhat unusual form of differences. Our inal sample of autobiographies as well as 351
 301 research design, previous studies in family business (Dawson additional material used can be found in Table 1. 352

302 and Hjorth 2012), entrepreneurship (Reveley 2010; Smith
 303 2005), and leadership (Humphreys et al. 2012; Westley and **Data Collection** 353

304 Mintzberg 1989) indicate the possibility of rigour in such
 305 design. There are, of course, limitations to using autobi- Autobiographies are the main source of our data, ofer- 354
 306 ographies, as they may “intentionally or unintentionally be ing a temporal account of how individuals build and shape 355
 307 written with an agenda or purpose in mind” (Mathias and organizations (Mathias and Smith 2016) in openly Chris- 356

308 Smith 2016, p. 208). Considering our research interest in tian family businesses. While the autobiographies vary in 357
 309 faith-led businesses, we believe that this is an advantage, as length, internal organization, and range of topics, they all 358
 310 autobiographies allow free expression of religious beliefs. cover the personal and organizational journey of each family
 359

Table 1 Sample firms and data sources

Family Business Head, Organization (industry)	Christian denomination	Key business indicators	Business practices influenced by the relationship with God	Key data sources
Michael Quimet Sr., Quimet-Tomasso (Canned Foods)	Catholic	Quimet-Tomasso Inc. was founded in 1989. It manufactures canned food, employing more than 1000 people. The company only had 3 losses in its history. The percentage of profits after sales is higher than any other Canadian company in the same industry	ISMA—Spirituality in Management—summarizes its practices	Quimet and Semen (2013). Everything has been loaned to you: The biography of a transformational CEO. Staten Island, New York: St. Pauls
Michael Cardone Sr., Cardone Industries (Remanufacturing of car parts)	Evangelical	Cardone is the largest privately held automotive parts remanufacturing company in the world, with 10,000 employees in Pennsylvania, California, Texas, Mexico, and Canada. The company has low turnover rates, fewer work-site injuries, lower absenteeism and tardiness rates, improved ability to attract and retain talented people, high levels of manufacturing quality, increased productivity and improved morale	The key underpinning practice at Cardone is the Family Program where employees are treated as part of the extended family	Cardone (2009). Business with soul: Creating a workplace rich in faith and values. Nashville: Thomas Nelson
Truett Cathy, Chick-Il-A (Food retail)	Baptist	Chick-Il-A is an American fast food chain specializing in chicken sandwiches and biscuits. In 2000, the company was ranked as one of the most ethical companies in the U.S. Chick-Il-A has been awarded the prestigious The Glassdoor Employees' Choice Award recognizing employees' benefits	There are two key practices underpinned by the relationship with God: closing on Sundays, and the link with the community around the restaurants	Cathy (2007). Eat more chicken: Inspire more people. Decatur, GA: Looking Glass Books
Norm Miller, Interstate Batteries (Battery retail)	Evangelical	Founded in 1952, this second-generation family business powers a network of 200,000 dealers. Their world-wide operation employs more than 1500 people and provides revenue in excess of 1.5 billion dollars	The bible and its principles are central to the work teams development and supported by the work of Chaplains	Miller and Hosier (1996). Beyond the norm. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson Publishers

Table 1 continued

Family Business Head, Organization (industry)	Christian denomination	Key business indicators	Business practices influenced by the relationship with God	Key data sources	Autobiography #pages
David Green, Hobby Lobby (Arts and Crafts retail)	Pentecostal	Started in 1972, the company has more than 3200 people working in 822 stores across the US. The company is famous for filing and winning a lawsuit against the United States in a matter that was against the values of the family	Hobby Lobby have each explains program and policy to close on Sundays for prayer and family time	Green and Merrill (2010). More than a hobby: How a \$600 start-up became America's home and crafts superstore. Nashville: Thomas Nelson	224
Mary Kay Ash, (Mary Kay Cosmetics), Beauty and Cosmetic Retail	Christian (non-denominational)	Mary Kay is the largest sales network of cosmetics in the world with more than 1.5 million members worldwide. Founded in 1963 with the idea of creating a flexible job, it now boasts revenues of more than 3.5 billion US dollars	A focus on God and God's principles has made Mary Kay appealing to those who form part of the Mary Kay family	Ash and Pendleton (2008). The Mary Kay way: Timeless principles from America's greatest woman entrepreneur. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons	238

business. We analysed more than 1271 pages across the six autobiographies.

While each autobiography is different, some common themes emerged. For example, all offered detailed examples of "God-centred" organizational practices, why these emerged and made sense, and how the leaders implemented them. The process dimension is of particular interest, as it allowed us to link leaders' behaviours to the changes that occur when a family business becomes a faith-led family business system. Finally, based on the personal and selective substance of the autobiographies, we sought additional data including financial reports, workforce absenteeism, and productivity levels. This allowed examining the changes in the family business subsystems and understanding how putting God first influences stewardship.

For each case, we supplemented the autobiographies with other publicly available sources (Mathias and Smith 2016). We included company reports and manuals, published research or teaching cases, and online interviews or talks on online video platforms. This additional data (see Table 1b)¹ allowed us to contextualize each family business and deepen our understanding of their faith-led processes and practices.

Data Analysis

We adopted Dawson and Hjorth's (2012) framework to generate insights from the family business narratives. In line with their recommendations, our analytical process followed three steps. The first was *explication*, which consists of summarizing the stories after reading and re-reading the autobiographies and taking extensive notes. We did this individually over a number of months and regularly met to discuss our views of each of the six narratives. Table 2 reports the outcome of our collective analysis.

The second step was *explanation* in which we interwove our reading of the autobiographies with the spirituality and family business literature. We built on established perspectives to inform our interpretation but were mindful not to be constrained by these (Hamilton 2006). In building interpretations, each member of the team read widely and explored different theory building avenues. During this phase, additional sources of data were included to enrich the emerging insights.

The third step was *exploration* in which we came together as a team to discuss the "so what" question. As we jointly moved between theory and data, we adopted an open-systems perspective to guide our analytical work. This led to linking our work with other dimensions of the family business literature, such as ownership and management

¹ Table S1b can be found in the supplementary files attached to this paper.

Table 2 Findings and analytical categories

Open-Systems Dimension	2nd-order data categories	1st-order categories	exemplar data from autobiographies
Business subsystem — their mandate of being excellent in everything they do is paramount	My father used to say “Excellence in all things and glory to God”. It is the pursuit of excellence that drives us because that is a worthy goal in life (p.42)		I want to be the very best competitor I can be. The Bible says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:10) (Green and Merrill 2010, p.13)
Business as God’s business	We have to do small, practical ways that, when added together, will make it possible to manage a company more and more in the manner of Jesus Christ (p.103)		God is first, family second and then work (Ash and Pendleton 2008, p.4)
Management subsystem — family and non-family members	Recruitment approach based on faith	We also realize the importance of taking care of the operators’ families. That is a secondary benefit of closing on Sundays. That operators and team members can count with at least one day a week devoted to family, worship and personal pursuits (p.102)	We care about our employees — physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually (Miller and Hosier 1996, p.189)
Workers as spiritual beings	All people working in the company or organization have been created by the Creator, who loves them and lives in them. This includes consumers as well. The company must serve people (p.3)		Leadership is about responsibility, leadership is about serving and leadership is about following after God and seeking him and His will in all our lives (p.121)
Family subsystem — nuclear and extended kinship relationships	Creating and developing family business	Anumber of the Green family members are involved in Hobby Lobby. I hold them to the same performance standard as anyone else. I didn’t push anyone to join in the first place. (p.151)	We value our people — we are committed to the following: Every person has intrinsic value and worth; every person has a unique contribution to make to the company; all people are treated equally with dignity; an individual’s family needs will be given priority (Cardone, p.50)
Communication and access between hierarchical levels	From the beginning, and until only recently, we interviewed every new candidate. I knew all the operators by name, and most of their spouses and children (p.97)		When someone enters my office to speak to me, I don’t allow anything to distract my attention ... I look directly at the person (p. ...)
Financial and public recognition for family members	A number of awards focus on what employees do for each other — practical “family” expressions (p.59)		Every year we would organize an event for the employees and that took a lot of planning and each time we would invite a guest speaker with a name recognition (p.108)
Ownership — the legal right to make decisions	Change in engagement but not decision-making	To my children and grandchild (re: (...)) would simply like to continue to tell them that, with the help of spirituality, it is possible to manage any organization (p.143)	We’re still family-owned, which keeps life a whole lot simpler. When my wife and kids and I decide to make a business move, we don’t have to ask Wall Street about it (p.196)

(Astrachan 2010). For our analysis, we produced a coding tree illustrating each dimension of the family business system affected by the relationship with God (Table 2).¹ We began noting a temporal effect in how the relationship with God shaped stewardship in these organizations and consequently included this dimension in the coding tree (Table 3). We present our data and analytical interpretation next.

meeting and my son said, ‘Dad it is not you, we are depending on God’” (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 137). As another example of his faith-led spousal support, “Barbara (my wife) tried to console me, ‘David, it’s God’s business. If He wants to take it away’” (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 183).

An Open-Systems Perspective of Faith-Led Family Businesses In terms of the business subsystem, our data show that the family business leaders describe how they create, shape, and introduce mechanisms and practices that contribute to the spiritual development of their organizational practices. This demonstrates the influence on their business, allowing their relationship with God to take precedence in decision-making. Pieper and Klein (2007, p. 301) suggest that the development or change in organizational practices explored through an open-systems perspective enables examining the “unique characteristics of a family business”. This section describes the four dimensions of the six faith-led family businesses.

The Business Subsystem

Our analysis highlighted the significant influence of Christian ethics, morals, and beliefs on the way in which each business operates. In contrast to the literature reporting that the emphasis is on what a company delivers (i.e. products or services), or how it should be done, our research shows that these faith-led family businesses balance a God-centred purpose with commercial activities. Cardone (2009, p. 42) describes the critical family motto “Excellence in all things and glory to God”. Similarly, Chick-il-A (Cathy 2007, p. 123) sees as “natural the act of glorifying God through (our) work”. Interestingly, all the autobiographies acknowledge their faith-led practices as beneficial for the business now and in the future. For example, the board at Cardone describes the distinctive triple bottom line (financial, social, and spiritual), “There is no perfect balance or solution to balancing the three bottom lines... we consider the challenge in establishing the triple bottom line to have contributed to our overall business success and continued growth since 1970” (Cardone 2009, p. 20). Without success in all these dimensions, Cardone suggests that a faith-led mission is incomplete.

Each autobiography includes an explanation of responding to God’s calling to draw on faith-led practices to manage and grow their business, a way of relying on Christian tenets to change the purpose and focus on business practices in a God-centred perspective. In Hobby Lobby, the owner comments, “In the 80s when the oil crisis hit we had a family meeting and my son said, ‘Dad it is not you, we are depending on God’” (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 183).

The Management Subsystem

The management subsystem highlights the importance of the structure of the management team running the family business (Pieper and Klein 2007). Our data show that family involvement is critical in developing top management teams, and features in all the autobiographies examined, highlighting the importance of family centred, faith-led values. For example, Scott Miller took over from Norm Miller at Interstate Batteries, Michael Cardone Jr. took over from Cardone Sr., Richard Rogers and Mary Kay’s son is now the Chairman. These examples demonstrate a common approach to the management subsystem to continue their work embedded in faith-led values. Servant leadership (Sendjaya et al. 2008) is for many family members an important example of how values translate into practice in these organizations. For instance, Interstate Batteries aims, “we are givers” (Miller and Hosier 1996, p. 142). Similarly, Chick-il-A staff operate on value driven transformative leadership (Caldwell et al. 2012). Sendjaya et al. (2008) state the two-fold approach of expressing their faith through service to others and cultivating a sense of meaning in the workplace for those in the management subsystem. These autobiographies illustrate how this type of leadership can apply to both family and

¹ Table 2 is complemented by Table S2b that can be found in the Supplementary files attached to this paper.

exemplifies this stating:

444 The autobiographies reveal that family business lead- non-family members. 491
445 ers resolve tensions by placing God at the centre of busi- Logically, the autobiographies advocate recruiting 492
446 ness matters. Indeed, they describe a God-led approach to non-family members with values in line with those of the 493
447 productivity, employment, commercial transactions, profit, organization. They describe how their faith-led approach 494
448 and competition, describing how tensions can be resolved, influences recruitment. Cardone, Chick-il-A, and Hobby 495
449 expressed as “giving the business to God” (Cardone 2009, p. Lobby all agree that being openly Christian allows them to 496
attract and recruit highly competent individuals to work in 497 their factories, main businesses, or franchises. Hobby Lobby 498

Table 3 Thematic interpretation of data in relation to stewardship

Open-systems dimension	Summary of patterns from data based on Table	nd-order data categories (based on Table 2)	Thematic interpretation in relation to stewardship	Dimensions of stewardship climate scale (Neubaum et al. 2017)
Business subsystem—their mand (To succeed, faith-led family businesses must balance three equally important dimensions: financial, social, and spiritual. 2 The gift to build and develop the business belongs to God. It is the role of the founder and team to give back to God what belongs to God	Being excellent in everything they do is paramount Business as God's business As the business belongs to God there is a faith-led motivation to act as stewards and not owners	As these organizations adopt distinct measures of success, they in turn create a distinct faith-led identity	Organizational identification Intrinsic motivation
Management subsystem—family and non-family members	Being openly Christian impacts on the recruitment process as distinct types of people approach the organization Workers also sons and daughters of God and therefore should be treated with the same dignity as any other member of the family business	Recruitment approach based on faith Recruitment is based on faith-led organizational identification. Employees commonly refer their own contacts to the organization Workers as spiritual beings All workers are assumed to have the same dignity and therefore they are treated collectively and involved actively in the management of the faith-led family business	Organizational identification; Collectivism Collectivism; involvement orientation	
Family subsystem—nuclear and extended kinship relationships	The family business develops and when the commercial, social, and spiritual dimensions develop in each person A very employed deserves the same dignity, they also should be treated similarly in the way communication reaches them and they participate in decision-making processes All members of family and non-family deserve to be publicly recognized for their efforts Whilst all members should be treated similarly in relation to communication and engagement, decision-making powers should stay within the family	Creating and developing a family business Communication and access between hierarchical levels Financial and public recognition for family members Change in engagement but not decision-making	Because every worker is spiritual being, they are invited to become part of the extended faith-led family business Communication and working practices between workers of the same humanness observed distinct rules of proximity and respect All members of the extended family business are recognized for their efforts Family business wants their organization to continue to serve God for many generations	Collectivism Low power distribution Use of personal forms of power Intrinsic motivation

500 Over the last few years we've been amazed to see how meal just to say hello and express, in action, not words, 550
 501 many top-notch, family oriented, solid productive the importance he gives to authentic communication 551 502 managers and
 other employees want to leave where and to each person's dignity (Ouimet and Semen 2013, 552
 503 they are and come and work for Hobby Lobby because p. 18) 553
 504 we close on Sundays (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 138).
 God-led family practices in relationships with non-family 554
 505 Such faith-related choices are crucial to selecting non-family members inspire the former to treat the latter as spiritual 555 506
 members for various management roles. Chick-il-A reports beings. The data highlight that a core feature of management 556
 507 similar results: in these faith-led organizations is the belief that all employ- 557
 ees are made in the image of God and that through work 558
 508 Closing our business on Sunday, the Lord's day, is they will achieve their purpose in life. According to Cardone 559
 509 our way of honouring God and showing our loyalty
 (2009, p. 104), this approach translates into "higher quality 560
 510 to him... I believe God honours our decisions and sets of work, productivity, creativity, and a greater sense of per- 561
 511 us before unexpected opportunities to do greater work sonal signiicance". Treatment of others as spiritual beings 562 512 for
 him because of our loyalty (Cathy 2007, p. 100). created by God allows family business leaders to develop 563 513 Interesting
 to note is how these decisions afect the workers' and shape management-related initiatives that nurture indi- 564
 514 families and wider community. Hobby Lobby and Chick-il- vidual development and a collective purpose. 565 515 A's decision to close
 on Sundays is a critical dimension of
 516 the organization. Hobby Lobby highlights how their employ-
 517 ees responded to this decision: **The Family Subsystem** 566
 518 One store sent me a group letter 'It is with heartfelt
 The data also highlight the importance of ascribing a family 567
 519 thanks that we, the associates of #147, join the thoumetaphor to all employees. Cardone, relecting on his father 568
 520 sands of other associates across the states in applaudwith whom he started Cardone Industries, contextualized 569
 521 ing our corporate leaders for taking the bold step in this: 570
 522 Sunday closings. We know this is a positive step for
 523 Hobby Lobby and pray that other retailers will join us Dad's respect for other people was part of his faith. He 571
 524 in bringing back those things that are important in our believed strongly in loving one's neighbour as one's 572
 525 lives (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 136). self... He saw all people as Gods children (Cardone 573
 2009, p. 191). 574
 526 The intrinsic motivation behind these signiicant practices is
 527 rooted in the desire to extend a God-led approach to all. This In all the autobiographies, the narratives illustrate a unique 575
 528 is also observable in the way these organizations discuss relational approach to family business leadership and man- 576
 529 the importance of making a chaplain available to all staf, agement deeply embedded in the importance of viewing oth-
 577
 530 from family to non-family members, to enable developing ers as members of a spiritual family (Discua Cruz 2013). 578
 531 their spirituality with the organization and God. Helping to Cardone exemplies the notion of an organizational family: 579 532
 see others as spiritual beings, Interstate Batteries highlights
 ... respect every person was a lesson from my father. 580
 533 that chaplains are "available for 'light' counselling... and
 My father treated everybody that worked for him as if 581
 534 prepared to deal with heavy problems" (Miller and Hosier they were part of the family... there was no discrimi- 582 535 1996,
 p. 134). nation and no regarding 'us' and 'them'... Everybody 583
 536 While the autobiographies mention the positive reperwas created equal in God's sight, we just have diferent 584
 537 cussions of implementing a God-centred approach to the jobs (Cardone 2009, p. 103). 585
 538 business management and operations, they also describe
 539 how a faith-based approach helps manage diicult issues. This illustrates the level of respect of management for the 586
 540 Ouimet reports the eforts to reduce redundancy through a entire workforce. Such configuration of faith-led ideas 587
 541 faith-led approach even when economic cycles demand the resembles a distributed form of leadership maintained by 588

542 contraction of the workforce. In these circumstances, Ouimet regularly engaging in faith-centred communication. The
589

543 highlights the importance of human gestures: practices described, namely, the rule of no glass towers and 590 no reserved
parking for executives (Hobby Lobby), one- 591

544 A simple gesture, profoundly human, and this is not to-one meetings (Interstate Batteries), and volunteering 592
545 always easy to do. For example a manager calls a perschemes (Ouimet and Cardone), indicate everyone's impor- 593
546 son that has been laid of three months earlier to say tance, regardless of their hierarchical level. At Ouimet and 594
547 hello and get the latest news; or a director decides to

Cardone, volunteering in the community promotes authentic 595

548 invite several dozen people, laid of six months to a communication across levels: 596
549 year previously for cofee and donuts or for a simple

597 Communication is based on 'being authentic yourself' **Discussion** 647
598 or greeting others with a real interest, or, even less, out

599 of a desire 'to manipulate people's motivation' just **A Faith-Led Open-Systems Perspective** 648
600 to improve productivity and proitability. Moreover, **of Stewardship** 649

601 especially people on the lower rungs of the company,
602 who have a great deal of intuition, are aware of the The previous section described the relevant subsystems 650
603 game and rapidly classify managers in three groups: that form a family business, including the personal, cul- 651
604 'straight shooters', 'manipulators' or 'enigmas'. It is a tural, and economic influences on the individual mem- 652
605 good thing too (Ouimet and Semen 2013, p. 19). bers of the family business with founders that integrate 653 the Christian faith.
Our work demonstrates practices that

606 Finally, proof of inancial and public recognition in each 654 occur within a family business system when business lead-
607 of the organizations is evident. Grounded in the spiritual 655 ers chooses to place God at the centre of the system along-
608 foundation that underpins the relationship between the 656 side themselves. We have shown that a faith-led family
609 members of these organizations, the cases describe ges- 657 business draws on a diferent conceptualization of both the
610 tures that reinforce reciprocal behaviour among employ- 658 business environment and the family dynamic through a
611 ees. Beyond the annual proit sharing scheme (present in 659 change in focus in the individual actor. Indeed, our analy-
612 all cases), these organizations created a number of specic 660 sis suggests that family business leaders associate their
613 awards recognizing "good" family practices. For example, 661 position in the family irm in relationship to God as part
614 Ouimet institutionalized the "Prize of Heart" for "someone 662 of a spiritual kinship network often referred to as "the
615 who has developed a way of being and acting that communi- 663 family of God".
616 cates solidarity, help for others, and human dignity, and who 664

This implies that for the organizations studied, the 617 does his

or her work in an exemplary manner" (Ouimet and 665 deinition of family is embedded in Biblical dimensions
618 Semen 2013, p. 19). Cardone also has a number of prizes 666 and extends to non-family members. Such organizations
619 that highlight family spirit, with the most important being 667 and family leaders do not isolate faith-led principles from
620 the "Cornerstone Award" that "celebrates the extraordinary 668 organizational dynamics, and are able to put into practice
621 character of the Factory Family members whose words and 669 one of the core biblical tenets on kinship:
622 actions are the foundation of Cardone's objectives and val- 670
623 ues" (Cardone 2009, p. 59). Such mechanisms highlight a So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but 671 624 God-centred
approach that leads all members of the organi- you are citizens with the saints and also members of 672
625 zation to feeling connected. the household of God, built upon the foundation of 673 the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus
himself 674

626 **The Ownership Subsystem** as the cornerstone (NRSV, Ephesians 2: 19-20) 675

interesting insight is how faith-led family businesses between family members but also creates a structure in 677
628 interpret ownership over time. We assumed that a faith- which all associates become part of the relational dynamic 678
629 based approach to family business would lead to a diferent in harmony with economic motivations. In this regard, our 679
630 approach to the legal ownership of such irms. Yet, all auto- data show that faith-led behaviours ind ways to integrate 680
631 biographies demonstrate no influence of religious values on deeply held values and an extended family perspective to 681
632 the ownership structures. Despite the evidence suggesting create intrinsic motivation and organizational identiica- 682

633 that they have a novel and in-depth way of engaging with 683
 634 employees at all levels, the ownership structures remained 684
 635 strictly linked to the family throughout the period analysed. 685
 636 For example, Ouimet passed the company to his three sons, 686
 637 Green and his wife passed Hobby Lobby to their sons and 687
 638 daughters, Cardone Sr. passed the baton to Cardone Jr. who 688
 639 has engaged his own children and respective families in the individual determine the actions and behaviours of 689
 640 development of the organization, Norm Miller engaged his the individual solely or as part of a larger group (Pie- 690
 641 son, Scott, who thereafter became CEO as soon as he had the 691
 642 appropriate experience. Such a progressive ownership struc- 692
 643 ture is in line with the reported findings on family business Leaders are therefore able to transform organizational 692
 644 ownership. We found no evidence of ownership distributed practices with an understanding of what God expects 693 645 to
 645 members of the extended spiritual family in the autobi- from them as part of an extended spiritual family and as 694 646 ographies
 646 we examined. 695
 647 stewards of a family business. This insight complements 696
 648 748 current understanding of stewardship (Davis et al. 2010) 697
 649 focused more on the role of blood links between family 698
 650 members within family business. By drawing on the effect 699
 651 that the individual's conception of his/her relationship 700
 652 with God has on the family business subsystems, it also 701
 653 extends knowledge on the open-systems perspective on 702
 654 family business. openly Christian family firms are be more interested in 703
 655 Logically, this faith-led family perspective in the organi- 704
 656 zation changes not only how stewardship emerges, but also 705
 657 how it transforms the organization over time. Indeed, the 706
 658 faith-led open-systems analysis enables us to show what this assess how (whether) Christian denominations (e.g. Catho- 707
 659 transformation looks like. In essence, each element func- lic or Anglican) around the world (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin 760
 660 tions in support of the other elements to ensure the stability 761
 661 the 761 and growth of the whole system grounded in Christian val- 762
 662 ues, creating a dynamic collectivistic perspective (Hofstede 763
 663 1984; Pieper and Klein 2007, p. 305) typical of stewardship. 764
 664 We show that the development of multiple dimensions of 765
 665 stewardship and their effect on organizational practices is 766
 666 714 rooted in a personal relationship with God. Thus, collectiv715
 667 and the underpinning organizational approaches emerge 716

Conclusion

716 from faith. Whilst the stewardship literature has linked col- 766
 717 lectivism with the values held by leaders (Hernandez 2008; 767
 718 Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2009), our work explicitly 768
 719 demonstrates that faith-led values influence organizational 769
 720 leadership practices. Overall, this also suggests that the 770
 721 personal relationship with God, shaping the development 721
 722 of a family business have greater repercussions than previ- 771
 723 ously thought (Steingard 2005; Tracey 2012). 772
 724 The open-systems analysis also unveiled practices that 773
 725 related work within family businesses (Holt et al. 2018) and 725
 726 illustrate substantial involvement, distributed forms of 774
 727 presenting a faith-led understanding of stewardship based 726
 728 power, and low power distance, which are also commonly 775
 729 on the accounts of religious business leaders, it enriches the 729

727 associated with stewardship (Neubaum et al. 2017). This is 776 theoretical dialogue on the relevance of religion in family 728 especially evident in how these organizations reciprocally 777 business (Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2018). Further studies 729 communicate with members, distribute responsibilities, and 778 of autobiographies in diverse contexts might provide a more 730 employ a serving logic across hierarchical levels. In turn, 779 nuanced understanding of the integration of faith in family 731 this creates an environment in which workers function as 780 businesses around the world (Gupta and Levenburg 2010).

732 stewards at their own level. Our data suggest that faith-led 781
 733 practices not only shape the way stewardship develops, 782
 734 but also support the emergence of new stewards across the

Compliance with Ethical Standards

735 organization. Whilst previous research has linked the emer- 783
 736 gence of stewards to a collective and aligned desire for suc-**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of 784
 737 cess (Eddleston and Kellermanns 2007), we observe that the interest. 785
 738 way faith is shared across the organization influences the
 739 way stewards emerge and remain committed to the organiza- **Ethical Approval** No procedures with human participants or animals 786
 740 tion, regardless of their family or non-family membership. were performed in this study. 787
 741 Overall, we add to the stewardship literature by reveal-742 ing how faith influences the emergence and development 743 of
 stewardship in family businesses. Stewardship has been

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744 conceptualized in previous studies as deriving from the emo- 788
 745 tional connection between the family business leader and

746 other family members (Davis et al. 2010), but our analysis 789
 747 shows that stewardship can also be embedded in faith-led 790
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Query	Details Required	Author's Response
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