**SALVATION, THEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES**

**ACROSS THE CENTURIES\***

**Abstract**

Humankind has a long history of seeking to be saved from suffering, although the understanding of just how to achieve this salvation has changed over time. Regardless of how it has been understood, throughout history the dominant understanding of salvation has been associated with how social structures and systems are organized. This paper provides an historical review of the relationship between salvation and organizational practices, paying particular attention to various views of salvation within the Western Christian tradition over the past two millennia. Using a three dimensional analytical framework—the *modality* of salvation, the *instantiation* of salvation, and the *locus* of ethical activity—we describe key changes in the meaning of salvation over time, and describe hallmark organizational practices associated with each meaning. We conclude by discussing implications of our analysis for examining relationships between organizational practices and salvation in other religious traditions, for developing a more nuanced understanding of emancipation, for developing counter-cultural approaches to management, and for strengthening a “theological turn” in organization and management theory.

Keywords: Max Weber, Protestant ethic, salvation, emancipation, Christian history, organizational history, archetype, myths, theology, suffering, Luther, Church fathers, Islam, world religions, theological turn

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According to Max Weber, the pursuit of salvation has for millennia played a central part in the history of humankind, even as the understanding of salvation has changed over the course of history. Of special interest in organization studies is Weber’s widely-accepted argument that the particular understanding of salvation associated with the Protestant ethic has had a great influence on the development of modern organization and management theory and practice (Weber, 1958 [original 1904]: 115ff). Somewhat ironically, Weber argues that the Protestant Reformation’s ideas of salvation have themselves given rise to a materialistic-individualistic “iron cage” from which modern people now seek to be saved (Weber, 1958; Dyck and Schroeder, 2005).

While the Protestant ethic underpinnings of modern management have long since been thoroughly secularized, which even Weber recognized by the turn of the 20th century (Weber, 1958: 72), we suggest that humanity’s age-old pursuit of salvation is still present and pervades contemporary organization and management theory literature (e.g., Ackers and Preston, 1997), though today it is rarely referred to in religious terms, nor typically called salvation. Rather, this idea—or perhaps better, this archetype—in our contemporary culture is more likely to be called by its secular expression emancipation (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Baum, 1989: 739; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 433; Greisman and Ritzer, 1981: 43, 47; Ratzinger and Habermas, 2006: 44-45; Laclau, 1996: 8). It may also be expressed more generally as the need to replace problematic mainstream organization and management theory with a qualitatively different approach (e.g., Ghoshal, 2005; Giacalone, 2004; Hamel, 2009; Podolny, 2009).

Given the persistent striving for salvation in human history, including its current secular manifestation, and given its acknowledged impact on modern organizing, we sought to understand how a more nuanced view of salvation may indeed offer a deeper understanding of emancipation which could be applied to current problematic organizational practices. In this endeavor, we follow Weber who suggested that salvation might come via the “rebirth of old ideas and ideals” (Weber, 1958: 182; see also Lee, 2010). Adopting a focus, then, on the Western Christian tradition, out of which the Protestant ethic and modern organizational practices developed, the purpose of this paper is to describe how (a) varying interpretations of the notion of salvation across different eras in the history of the Western Christian tradition are linked to (b) varying organizational practices in those eras. In making the link between organizational practice and the interpreted-meaning of salvation, we hope to alert readers not only the historical importance of this relationship, but also to sensitize them to the importance of this linkage going forward. In particular, we describe how our three-dimensional understanding of salvation may prove fruitful for developing a more nuanced understanding of emancipation, and how our study provides further support for the “theological turn” taking place in organization studies.

The structure of our paper is threefold. First, we briefly review the meanings of salvation across a variety of world religions, and develop a three-dimensional conceptual framework based on Weber’s analysis of how the meaning of salvation has changed through history. Second, we use this framework to explore changes in the meaning of salvation within the Western Christian tradition over the past two millennia, and how these changes are associated with changes in organizational practices. Third, we discuss the implications of our analysis for organization studies.

**SALVATION AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES**

According to Max Weber, the question of suffering, and thus the relief of that suffering, has been central to the origin and development of religion (i.e., how people order their relationship to the transcendent realm; see also Durkheim, 2001 [original 1912]) throughout history. For Weber, salvation refers to transcendent ways for humankind to be liberated from suffering, and indeed many understandings of salvation are evident across world religions. The breadth and depth of the idea of salvation, glimpsed in Table 1, points to the universality of the human experience of suffering and the desire for its relief (see also the field of soteriology). In other words, these varied expressions of salvation may be instances of specific cultural myths based on a more foundational archetype fundamental to humanity. By myth, we do not mean the pejorative sense of that which appears “fantastical or uncertifiable” from the perspective of rationalism, but rather an expression of a culture’s experience of a much deeper phenomenon undergirding all humanity (Hatch, Kostera, and Koźmiński, 2005: 72). Myth in this sense connects us to our ancestral past and to the core elements of our common humanity (Hatch, Kostera, and Koźmiński, 2005: 75-76). **ELDEN: Nice addition. However, now that we’ve established the meaning of myth, it seems like it would be a good idea to use it in the next paragraph. Is one of my three insertions below appropriate, or can you find a better fit, or is it okay to leave it out?**

As the [a mythical] expression of the suffering/relief archetype, we can expect salvation [myth] in its many [mythical] understandings to be manifest within each culture through various practices (Hatch, Kostera, and Koźmiński, 2005). This is the particular interest of this study. Weber argues that (1) how people understand salvation often has an influence on and coincides with changes in social and organizational structures and systems, and (2) the understanding of salvation, and hence its manifestation in social and organizational structures and systems, may change over time *within* religions (Kalberg, 2001). We will look at each in turn.

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**Link between salvation and organization practice**

Weber argues that there is a link between beliefs about salvation and organizational practices, as we would suspect from the perspective of archetypes expressed in myths. His analysis, however, is much more nuanced than to suggest a simple cause-effect relationship between them (Kalberg, 2001). On the one hand he famously argues that

*religious ideas* themselves simply cannot be deduced from economic circumstances. They are in themselves, that is beyond doubt, the most powerful plastic elements of national character, and *contain a law of development and a compelling force entirely their own.* (Weber, 1958: 277-78; emphasis added here)

On the other hand, he also points to the importance of “economic development on the fate of religious ideas” (p. 277). Taken together, for Weber the relationship between salvation and organization practice may best be characterized as a “process of mutual adaptation” (p. 277).

Although there has not been much research on this topic, previous studies examining the effect of differing religious beliefs on organizational practices generally supports Weber’s views. For example, a study among a variety of world religions finds a relationship between organizational practice and creeds among religious organizations, suggesting that religions do in fact practice what they preach (or vice versa) (Dyck, Starke, Harder and Hecht, 2005). Other research on world religions shows that the religious beliefs which have the greatest affect on increasing economic growth are those related to an after-life (McCleary, 2007: 50; Barro and McCleary, 2003; see also Graafland, Kapstein, and van der Duijn Schouten, 2007; Albertson, 2009). A country-specific study in France examines changes in the meaning of salvation from 1540-1630 and their effect on performativity (see Ramsey, 1999, for whom performativity refers to acts of religious ritual and symbolism that confirm the presence of the spiritual within the physical world, such as the ringing of church bells, providing for banquets, and the presence of the poor in conjunction with funerals), and another study in France examines changes in the meaning of the spirit of capitalism in the past century (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Finally, a study among self-professing Christian managers shows that difference in their religious beliefs are related to organizational structures and systems (Dyck and Weber, 2006).

A study that lends strong support to Weber’s argument that is of particular relevance for our research examines changes in religious beliefs within Western Christianity over the past two millennia, finding a strong relationship to organizational practices (Bay, McKeage and McKeage, 2010: 673). Given that religious values should be stable and not change over time, Bay et al argue that the fact they did change suggests the overall changes are caused more by economic forces than by religious beliefs. That is, over its history Western Christianity has served as a legitimating handmaiden of business:

There is no evidence … that religious precepts (or any other personal or societal set of values) can stand against the economic pressures of business with any success over the long term. … Over time, business evolved from being an absolute bar to this goal [i.e. salvation], to being an obstacle, to being an actual praxis for said salvation. Other sets of principles from other domains, such as philosophy, seem likely to fare equally poorly in evangelizing the business domain. … As long as a good business is defined as one with a strong bottom line, the most convincing principle to be applied in most business decisions will relate to that bottom line, rather than to any religious principles or the good of society. (Bay et al., 2010: 673)

However, elsewhere Bay et al (2010: 658) also acknowledge how an alternative understanding of salvation *can* be a compelling force to challenge the status quo:

From time to time over the centuries, splinter groups of Christians have attempted to return to the radically communitarian principals of the earliest Christians. Some have adapted and practiced manufacture and trade (Shakers) or nonsubsistence farming (Mennonites). However, these groups, when they have survived, still tend to be very small and marginalized, and are forced to practice a degree of withdrawal from the world, and devote a great deal of energy to group identity. (p. 658)

Taken together, their findings support the idea that there is a relationship between the meaning of salvation and organizational practices. While they seem to suggest that economic activity has tended to cause religious beliefs to change over time, they also provide support for Weber’s contention that religious beliefs can provide the impetus to adopt organizational practices that are counter-cultural.

As with any longstanding influential work, other details of Weber’s analysis have also been examined and questioned, such as whether Weber accurately reflects the teachings of Protestants during the Reformation (e.g., Tawney, 1926; Walzer, 1965) and whether Protestants actually perform better economically than other faith groups (de Jong, 2008). While important, these criticisms do not detract from our present study. Weber’s overarching argument of a relationship between the meaning of salvation and organizational practices still persists.

**Christian meaning(s) of salvation: A three-dimensional conceptual framework**

In light of Weber’s widely-accepted argument that contemporary organization theory and practice has been greatly influenced by the understanding of salvation as interpreted within the Reformation’s Protestant ethic, our study will focus on examining various meanings of salvation throughout the history of Western Christianity (Haight, 1994). Our analysis will describe how views of salvation have changed over the past two millennia, and how these changes are associated with variations in organizational practices.

Even though salvation is a core concept within Christianity, scholars agree that there is no universally accepted understanding of what salvation means within Christianity.

The concept of salvation is central to Christianity. From a historical perspective, the experience of Jesus as savior is the basis from which the Christian movement sprang…. *Yet despite this centrality and importance, the Church has never formulated a conciliar definition of salvation nor provided a universally accepted conception.* This is not necessarily something negative, but it still leaves us with a pluralism in the domain of the theology of salvation, the meaning of which remains open and fluid. (Haight, 1994: 225, emphasis added here; see also Borovoy, 1972: 38)

This is not to say that there is not a general definition of salvation that would get widespread agreement. For example, although scholars agree that it is impossible to find in the New Testament “a fully consistent synthesis” (Schillebeeckx, 1980: 463, quoted in Haight, 1994: 229) regarding the meaning of salvation, one review suggests it can be reduced to “Jesus makes God present in a saving way” (Haight, 1994: 229). However, this relatively simple understanding has little to say about how salvation is achieved, where and when it is evident, and for whom it is available. Similar ambiguities are evident in the Christian definition of salvation provided in Table 1, which links salvation to other concepts—such as grace of God, eternal life, and forgiveness of sin—that themselves have been understood differently over time and across denominations.

*Towards a Weberian conceptual framework for understanding salvation.* In order to provide a more nuanced understanding of salvation, and to begin to differentiate between differing views of salvation, we develop a conceptual framework based on Weber’s analysis of the changing understanding of salvation across a variety world religions over time, summarized in Table 2 (see especially Weber 1946a [original 1920]: 324-328, 354; 1946b: 271-287; 1968: 399-451; 518-529; 577-78; 1179; our review draws heavily from the excellent analysis found in Kalberg, 2001). We note that Weber’s analysis exhibits both a historical-empirical and a metaphysical approach to the development of the archetype of suffering/relief over time (Hatch, et al., 2005: 74). The delineation of salvation from rather simple concepts and corresponding structures to more complex ones suggests an evolutionary development of the concept. Its on-going, richly varied expression among religions worldwide (Table 1), and its differentiation within Christianity over time (Table 3), suggests the recognition of the universality of the archetype and its meaningfulness: “Because of the universality of their archetypal symbolism, myths transcend time—time may pass, but the human condition remains the same” (Hatch, et al., 2005: 75-76).

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Weber’s analysis gives rise to a three-dimensional conceptual framework that we will use to examine changes in the relative meaning of salvation over the past 2,000 years within the Western Christian tradition, and how these changes coincides with changes in organizational practices (see Table 3). The first dimension, the *modality* of salvation, denotes the primary channel or means by which salvation is achieved. Weber suggests two basic modalities: (a) a prophet may provide an *example for living* (e.g., salvation comes to those who follow a prophet as a role model), or (b) a prophet may provide a *sacrificial* death which serves to redeem or to act as a ransom for humankind (e.g., Jesus provides salvation for believers by dying on the cross on their behalf so that their sins could be forgiven). The second dimension, the *instantiation* of salvation, denotes the primary realm where salvation is said to be evident. Although religious salvation is at its core transcendent, Weber points to two basic realms where the relative emphasis of salvation being evident can be placed: (a) the physical/natural realm (e.g., the relative emphasis is on salvation being evident in people’s actions in this world) or (b) a transcendent ethical/spiritual realm (e.g., the relative emphasis is on salvation being assured in the after-life). Finally, the third dimension, the *locus* of ethical activity, denotes whether salvation is primarily at the level of (a) individuals (e.g., a focus on personal salvation) or (b) groups (e.g., a focus on social salvation).

**Western Christian understandings of salvation through history, and implications for organization practice**

In order to operationalize the Western Christian understandings of salvation, we follow Weber’s use of ideal-types, noting that the only way to examine something like the spirit of capitalism is via “an historical individual, i.e. a complex of elements associated in historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance” (Weber, 1958: 47). For example, in developing his idea of the Protestant ethic, Weber uses Richard Baxter as his exemplar (though he also draws on others like Martin Luther and John Calvin). Following this method, we examine a series of exemplary understandings of salvation from the time of Jesus to the present and, as shown in Table 2, we identify four basic historical eras—demarcated by junctures (Mills, 2010)—that are helpful for our study: 1) biblical and early church; 2) post-Constantine and Middle Ages; 3) Reformation, and 4) contemporary Faith at Work movement.

The exemplars we draw upon to develop these four ideal-type eras include: (a) the biblical writings of Luke, whose biblical gospel is considered the one that places the most emphasis on salvation (e.g., Fitzmyer, 1970: 223; Ehrman, 2008; e.g., Luke refers to salvation more than any other gospel); (b) nine theologians (Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Anselm, Abelard, Luther and Calvin) known for their exemplary contribution to the meaning of salvation up to and including the Reformation (identified and summarized by Haight, 1994), and (c) a description of the past century of the Faith at Work movement in the United States (especially Miller, 2007). After describing the beliefs about salvation characterizing each era, we also provide a description and ideal-type examples of how these beliefs are operationalized in organizational practices in each era.

Of course, following Weber, we do not purport to suggest that the four ideal-types subsumed in the four eras always hold, nor that they fully represent the views of even the exemplars we highlight. Rather we offer them as coherent conceptual configurations to help grasp basic differences in the understanding of salvation over time in Christianity. Put differently, we fully recognize that there will be important exceptions to these categories, that the exemplars may not match the categories exactly in all of their teachings, and that the shifts across the three Weberian dimensions of salvation are not changes from one “extreme” to the other but rather as shifts in relative emphasis. We now describe each era in turn.

**ERA 1: Biblical times and early church**

*Modality of salvation*. Luke and early theologians emphasize that the modality through which Jesus provides salvation is via following his example as role model, rather than via his sacrificial death on the cross. For example, Luke never indicates that Jesus’ death itself is what brings salvation from sin (Ehrman, 2008: 166; though other Christian writings by Paul or John may suggest otherwise). This emphasis on the importance of Jesus as role model is also evident in our exemplar theologians writing in the second and early third century. For example, Irenaeus (?-202) draws on Pauline writings to argue that Jesus offers salvation insofar as Jesus serves as a new-and-improved Adam to exemplify how humankind was intended to live:

Jesus repeats the role of Adam; the incarnate Word [i.e., Jesus] takes up and reenacts the entire pattern of human existence but this time “gets it right.” He thus sets things back in their original created order. (Haight, 1994: 236)

Jesus’ role as the second Adam is described as being a servant (e.g. Luke 22:27; Philippians 2:7). Service to others is a central characterization of Jesus’ life and work during this era. Similarly, for Irenaeus, salvation comes via Jesus’ incarnation (by imitating Jesus as an exemplary role model, followers also can overcome death and suffering), not via Jesus’ crucifixion (though taking up one’s cross is an important part of living as the second Adam). This emphasis on Jesus as a role model is also evident in Origen (185-254), who saw Jesus as sort of a miniaturized replica of God in order to reveal the incomprehensible God to humankind, thereby leading humankind back to God: “Jesus is savior by revealing God and being an exemplar of human existence” (Haight, 1994: 236).

*Instantiation of salvation*. In this era, the relative emphasis is on salvation being already evident in the physical world, versus only in the after-life. For example, the only instance in Luke where Jesus himself uses the word salvation occurs when he says “salvation has come” to the house (i.e. the goods and service producing organization) of a tax collector named Zacchaeus, who has promised to give half his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold anyone he had defrauded (Luke 19: 8-9). A similar emphasis on a this-world instantiation of salvation is also evident in Jesus’ teachings of the kingdom of God (the topic he taught about most often), which he grounds in the present world and describes as being evident when people gather and share together from all walks of life, especially the marginalized (i.e., the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind; see Dyck and Sawatzky, 2010). Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven, and he emphasizes sharing financial resources in this world in sayings like: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18: 25). Finally, the emphasis on a this-worldly instantiation of salvation is also evident in Ireneaus and Origin, who emphasize that Jesus is a role model for living in this world (Haight, 1994). According to Ireneaus, the salvation is evident when the people’s economic actions are consistent with God’s spirit: “In the economy, man reconciles in his body the two extremes of flesh and spirit which God brings together through his plan of salvation” (Osborn, 2001: 131).

*Locus of ethical activity*. During this era there is great emphasis on salvation being concerned with challenging unjust social systems and structures, rather than exclusively on individual piety. Yoder (1972:97) emphasizes the social nature of Jesus’ servanthood when he notes the cross that followers are called to take up does not refer to individualized things like “an inward wrestling of the sensitive soul with self and sin.” Rather, the cross of salvation in Luke reflects “the social character of Jesus’ cross … the price of his social nonconformity … it is the social reality of representing to an unwilling world the Order to come.”

In order to better understand this social dimension of salvation, it is helpful to note the meaning of salvation in its larger historical socio-political context in first-century Palestine. While today we identify terms like Savior and Son of God as primarily religious in nature, in first-century Palestine those terms are regularly used to refer to the Roman emperor, who also serves as the figurehead for the Imperial cult of the Empire. Virtually every coin ever minted in the Roman Empire refers to the emperor as the Son of God, and he is also often called a Savior, Father and Lord (Neyrey, 2005; Reed, 2007). Thus, use of such language by Jesus and to describe Jesus would have had clear political connotations *in situ*, with Jesus seen as a subversive threat to the political elite (in addition to being a threat to the leading Jewish teachers of his day). This is also the case for Ireneaus and Origen, as they were writing in a time when the Christian church is a minority and often persecuted by Imperial Rome.

*Implications for organizational practice*. Management is evident in two key socio-economic institutions in first-century Palestine: the management of the household, and patron-client relations (Dyck, Starke and Weimer, forthcoming). The word for household management--*oikonomia—*is where we get the modern word economics. However, to translate *oikos* as house is misleading because (1) *oikos* is the primary goods and services producing organization in the first century (unlike today, where house refers to a consumptive that does not produce goods and services), and (2) an *oikos* can encompass many different biological families (e.g., it includes a husband and wife, their children, their slaves, and their slave children; indeed the Roman empire is called the *oikos* of the emperor). Due to high taxation rates, in first-century Palestine bankruptcy is a problem for many *oikos*, contributing to increased numbers of large absentee landowners and thus increased numbers of managers. About ten percent of the population lack the security of an *oikos* to care for them (i.e., they are homeless). First century Palestine is also associated with increase in what Aristotle called unnatural *chrematistics*, characterized by profit-maximizing behavior (which Aristotle condemns, encouraging instead natural *chrematistics,* which involves using money to trade for everyday needs, but not to use money to make money).

The second main arena for management in the first century Roman empire—patron-client relations—describes the relation of indebtedness between the rich and the poor. In those days even something as simple as loaning money (e.g., to pay the high taxes) is not a one-time event; rather it demands entering a long-term relationship with a patron, to whom the client then owes honor in addition to financial debt.

The organizational forms of the early church undermine and provide an alternative to both of these social institutions (*instantiation*). The early Christians develop new forms of organizations, ones that followed Jesus’ example by welcoming people who are outcasts/marginalized/homeless (*modality*). And they subvert traditional patron-client relationships; instead, the rich act as benefactors and provide financial resources for the poor and for the benefit the larger community without any further obligations or indebtedness (*locus of ethicality*). This is illustrated in *Acts*, the New Testament book that describes life in the early church immediately after the time of Jesus, where the meaning of salvation is clearly connected with the socio-economic *oikos* of Jesus’ earliest followers:

*All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.* Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being *saved.* (Acts 2: 44-47, emphasis added here, Bible, New Revised Standard Version; see also Acts 4: 32-37; note that Acts was written by same author who wrote the Gospel of Luke)

Further indication that the early church’s understanding of salvation influences how it organizes itself in this world and the nature of their economic activity is evident the Epistle of James, a New Testament book that pre-dates the Pauline churches of Asia Minor (Gotsis and Drakopoulou-Dodd, 2004: 32). This book describes how Jesus’ earliest followers organized themselves according to what has been called the Jerusalem Love Community. A central teaching in James’ Epistle—and the one which would eventually irk Martin Luther so much as to move the book of James towards the back of the New Testament—was the idea that faith without works is dead:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that? … For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. (James 2:14-26, Bible, New Revised Standard Version)

James criticizes the dominant conventional social and organizational practices in first-century Palestine (e.g., unnatural *chrematistics*, the widening gap between rich and poor, indebtedness, exclusive *oikos* that do not accept the unclean, sick, and foreigners), and promotes the hallmarks of the Jerusalem Love Community (rich sharing with the poor without obligation, people treating one another with dignity, inclusiveness that goes beyond kinship groups) (Gotsis and Drakopoulou-Dodd, 2004). The Jerusalem Love Community is known for welcoming the ten percent of society in the first-century who are outcasts (i.e., the poor, the dispossessed, and others who did not have the security of belonging to an *oikos*).

Evidence of these alternative ways of organizing is also found in non-biblical writings of the time, including those of the early Church Fathers. For example, Origen noted how the Gospel challenged traditional organizational practices. Early Christians established “extraordinary” organizations that closed the gap between rich and poor (“aristocrats and their slaves shared in one and the same eucharist”) and were characterized by “service to the community” (rather than the traditional emphasis on “self-respect and honour”) (Chadwick, 2002: 68-69).

**ERA 2: Post-Constantine and the Middle Ages**

Christianity, and its understanding of salvation, underwent significant change after the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 CE, and eventually Christianity became the official religion of the empire. The church ceased being a “persecuted minority faith” (Todd, 2002: 139) and instead church leaders “were endowed with both power and wealth, with predictable consequences on their lifestyles” (Dodd and Gotsis, 2007: 140).

*Modality of salvation.* During this era there is a transition from salvation coming via Jesus as (subversive) exemplary role model, to salvation coming via Jesus as sacrifice. Athanasius (293-373), one of the Church Fathers, serves as somewhat of a transition figure. He is well-known for saying that “He [Jesus] was humanized that we might be deified” (Haight, 1994: 236). However, rather than focus on how Jesus accomplishes this by being a *role model* for humankind (as in the pre-Constantine era), “in Athanasius Jesus also saves by revealing and by undergoing sacrificial death” (Haight, 1994: 236). The theme of Jesus’ death having redemptive qualities is also evident in Gregory of Nyssa (335–after 394), who “developed a mythic subtext to Jesus' passion and death: Jesus was innocent bait for Satan's lust for dominion, and, by destroying Jesus unjustly, Satan lost any justification for his hold on humankind” (Haight, 1994: 236). Augustine of Hippo (354-430) builds on this idea, referring to Jesus’ death as a redemption—a payment of ransom—and a sacrifice. Several centuries later, Anselm (1033-1109) develops this further via his theory of satisfaction, which implies that Jesus pays the debt of humankind to satisfy God’s righteousness: “Jesus took our place, he died in our stead” (Haight, 1994: 237).1 Moreover, evidence suggests sometimes these post-Constantine ideas were retroactively inserted into the biblical record.2

*Instantiation of salvation*. During this era, salvation becomes increasingly instantiated in the transcendent realm and relatively less in the natural realm. This transition is evident in the monastic movement with its de-emphasis on pleasures in this world via asceticism, and in the growing emphasis on achieving spiritual salvation in the after-life via participating in the sacraments. This transition may have been prompted in part by the desire for religious leaders to retain their newfound power and status within the Roman Empire by developing a non-subversive role that would not interfere with this-worldly concerns of their political supporters (Dodd and Gotsis, 2007). A different rationale for this emphasis on the spiritual realm and the afterlife became particularly relevant after the fall of Rome in 410 CE, which brought with it a need to explain why Christianity had not been able to save the empire. Augustine defended Christianity against the call to return to pagan gods by claiming the ultimate triumph of the *spiritual* City of God even in the face of the decimation of the *earthly* one (Rome). Those who hold to the City of God should focus on that heavenly spiritual city (often later identified as the ‘invisible’ Catholic Church), renounce the world and its pleasures, and dedicate themselves to spiritual and eternal truths of Christianity (Latourette, 1975).

*Locus of ethical activity*. Ethical activities associated with salvation in this era are still largely at the community or societal (versus individual) level. This is illustrated by the oft-repeated proclamation dating back to the third century: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—no salvation outside of the church. The church is seen as the unique means of salvation; salvation is not primarily the matter of individuals and their personal relationship with God. Beyond this primary emphasis on the institution of the church itself and its forms of worship and sacraments, the emphasis on the social (versus individual) nature of ethical activity is perhaps most evident in the communal nature of monasticism increasingly prominent during this era (partly influenced by the ideals of Jerusalem Love Community) (Dodd and Gotsis, 2007; Latourette, 1975).

*Implications for organizational practice*. This era is characterized by an emphasis on centralized hierarchies and rationalization as the Pope and the growing clerical class enjoy increased access to power and wealth. These characteristics are reflected in monasticism, which is a hallmark feature of life in this era. Here the leading exemplar is St. Benedict, who develops a series of rules that foreshadow and share much in common with Fayol’s 14 principles of management, written some 15 centuries later (Kennedy, 1999). Weber (1958: 118-119) describes how St. Benedict had “developed a systematic method of rational conduct” that “trained the monk, objectively, as a worker in the service of the kingdom of God, and thereby further, subjectively, assured the salvation of his soul.” St. Benedict “saw the practical necessity for a written set of rules and counsels that would guide the community in its daily life so as to provide the opportunity for spiritual growth in an orderly and organized atmosphere” (Kennedy, 1999: 269); his rules provide a sort of “science of salvation” (Moss, 1957: 50; cited in Kennedy, 1999: 270). Benedict’s Rule provided one of the main models through which people engaged in organized work right up to the Protestant Reformation (Tredget, 2002: 221).

As with the Jerusalem Love Community characterizing the first era, the Benedictine rules place great emphasis on developing a socially inclusive community (*locus of ethicality*). For example, the rules indicate that there is to be no social distinction between monks who come from wealthy Roman families and those who had been former slaves; instead, the relative status of monks is determined by the length of time in the monastery. Consistent with this, upon entry monks give up all rights to private ownership, including personal possessions and any profit they might make for sale of crafts or services (Tredget, 2002).

With regard to *instantiation*, the emphasis toward the spiritual world is evident in asceticism that characterizes monastic life. This signals a down-playing of concern for the material world, and an increased emphasis on a narrower definition of spiritual matters. For example, the monks’ work is divided into two kinds: 1) daily manual work, and 2) the Work of God, which is their primary task (e.g., sing or recite all 150 psalms in the Old Testament each week). In this era monks join monasteries in order “to avoid secular influences and distractions and to attend to their spiritual lives” (Bay et al, 2010: 660).

The high degree of regimentation in Benedictine daily life is accompanied by a hierarchical and centralized structure. For example, monks are to carry out the abbot’s orders as if they were commanded direct from God (Kennedy, 1999: 271). A shift in the *modality* of salvation toward Jesus–as-sacrifice may be associated with a hierarchical orientation where a centralized figure becomes the overseer dispensing this salvation, rather than having everyone adopt Jesus as exemplar or role model. This is consistent with a Pope and priests administering the sacraments. This idea of leaders as gatekeepers to salvation is evident in the rule: “The abbot must, therefore, be aware that the shepherd will bear the blame wherever the father of the household finds that the sheep have yielded no profit” (Tredget, 2002: 223). “In terms of management style, a Benedictine community tends to be autocratic or paternalistic. However, [reflecting its non-individualistic emphasis] the decision-making process is in many ways participative and consultative” (Tredget, 2002: 225).

Not surprisingly, taken together these regimented rules result in monasteries becoming financially successful. “They become important landowners, employers and played an essential role in the local economy” (Tredget, 2002: 221). Moreover, monasteries’ growth in number and size contribute to an increasing reliance on monetary transactions to manage their affairs, often resulting in increased emphasis on financial concerns. This leads to the creation of new alternative monasteries

founded upon a spiritual quest and voluntary poverty. ‘*What many of these had in common was a rejection of the new, specifically monetary materialism, particularly as found in the ecclesiastical institutions’* (Little, 1978: 99)

(cited in Dodd and Gotsis, 2007: 144; their emphasis).

**ERA 3: The Reformation and Weber’s characterization of the Protestant Ethic**

*Modality of salvation*. Like the previous era, the Reformation’s Protestant ethic is associated with a Jesus-as-sacrifice view of salvation (Weber, 1958: 238). Luther and Calvin are known for placing particular emphasis on Jesus’ suffering as being salvific (Haight, 1995).

*Instantiation of salvation.* As in the second era, the relative emphasis in this era is placed on salvation in the after-life/spiritual realm. However, in contrast to the previous era, an important difference is the great emphasis placed on *how* salvation is confirmed in the present natural world. Of particular interest to our study, in this era a strong work ethic and financial success come to be signs of salvation (Sandelands, 2010: 60). To be clear, good works in the physical realm are seen as unnecessary and even harmful for *attaining* salvation; however, *after* salvation had been attained (i.e., after a person had been affirmed as one of the elect), good works and having a good work ethic are considered essential (Weber, 1958: 247; McCleary, 2007: 65-66). “The Chosen must work very hard and live righteously to demonstrate the fact of their salvation” (Bay et al., 2010: 666). But because people can never be totally sure of their spiritual salvation, they continually seek confirmatory evidence of it in the physical realm.

However, the nature of the prescribed activity in the physical realm is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, reflecting a concern for the after-life, a great deal of emphasis is placed on having an ascetic lifestyle (not unlike monasteries in the previous era; Weber, 1958: 157-158). On the other hand, God’s blessings of salvation are said to be evident when individuals rationalize their work and maximize the fruits of their labour. “Wealth is … not only morally permissible, but actually enjoined. … *The attainment of it [i.e., wealth] as a fruit of labour in a calling was a sign of God’s blessing*” (Weber, 1958: 162, 163, 172; emphasis added here). This paradox—asceticism, coupled with methodical focus on maximizing productivity borrowed from the monasteries—helps to explain why this understanding of salvation contributes to unprecedented economic gain (Kalberg, 2001: 318).

One reason this change can happen is because of the tendency during that time among both Protestants and Catholics to place increasingly more emphasis on the after-life:

Not only the Protestants but also the Council of Trent [an important Catholic council, 1545-1563] to a large extent sought to reduce the traditional Catholic sense of immanence and make the divine more transcendental, that is, removed from the physical world. (Baumgartner, 2000: 679)

*Locus of ethical activity*. Luther and Calvin’s distinct contribution to the understanding of salvation is their emphasis on sin being within *individuals* (Haight, 1994: 241). In contrast to the previous two eras, and partly in response to the perceived excesses associated with salvation via the Catholic sacraments (e.g., where salvation can essentially be purchased via indulgences), in this era salvation becomes an individual affair: “In what was for the man [sic] of the age of Reformation the most important thing in life, his *eternal salvation*, he was forced to follow his path *alone* to meet a destiny that was decreed to him from eternity” (Weber, 1958: 104; emphasis added here).

The idea of an individual’s *calling* is particularly important in this regard. In this era individuals are said to be called to their stations in life, and they have a duty to God to perform their jobs. This new orientation to living the Christian life brings holy living out of the monasteries and into all aspects of the everyday world of work and life. “The only way of living acceptable to God was…solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the *individual* by his [sic] *position* in the world” (Weber, 1958: 80; emphasis added here).

This increased emphasis on individualism also made in-roads among the Catholics. For example, Hopfl (2000: 319) describes the individualistic ideas that inform the organizational ideas of the Jesuit founders (1534ff), whose “ultimate end” is “saving the souls of its members and of their neighbors.” This spirit of individualism is evident in their emphasis on:

individual conscience, commitment, self-discipline, and relationship with God. Hence the rooted antipathy to the communal offices of older orders, the devotion to auricular confession and frequent (private) examination of conscience, and the individuation of even collective acts of worship like the mass, where the individual’s meditations are to be as if he or she were alone with God. The same is true of the entire literature of devotion and piety which forms far and away the bulk of Jesuit publication (apart from textbooks) in the 16th century. (Hopfl, 2000: 232)

*Implications for organizational practice.* Reformation ideas attract people who are frustrated with the excesses of the Catholic Church and who ascribe spiritual meaning to their everyday work life (including business). Luther denounces commercial profit-seeking activity in the most stringent of terms, but Calvin sees commerce as an integral part of life and does not have the same misgivings about usury, even becoming personally involved in what today might be termed social entrepreneurship by starting up several ventures designed to provide jobs for the poor (e.g., watch-making, curtain manufacture; Dodd and Gotsis, 2007: 152). Any ambiguity toward profits decreases over time with interpretations by Puritans (like Baxter) and with secularization.

Josiah Wedgwood provides perhaps the best exemplar of the influence that Reformation salvation ideas have on organizing (Langton, 1984). Starting in 1759, Wedgwood, a British entrepreneur within the pottery industry, helps to transform an impoverished geographic region with an undisciplined workforce around Manchester, England into one of the leading growth areas of the Industrial Revolution. A key to Wedgwood’s success is introducing highly-rationalized practices into the everyday workforce, bringing elements associated with Benedict’s regimented science of salvation out of the monastery and applying them at the level of individual workers. Another key is the preaching of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who “convinced the poor that they had their proper worth before God [*thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice:* *modality*]. He also convinced them that to be “saved” [*in the after-life: instantiation*] they must live more sober and respectable lives” (Archer, 1973: 53; cited in Langton, 1984: 343). In short, the message is that everyone is individually called by God (*personal* *locus of ethical activity*) to their job, that God wants everyone to work hard in their jobs, and that doing so will assure them of both salvation and material blessings.

On the basis of this theological foundation (Langton, 1984: 342) and consistent with the idea of individual calling, Wedgwood completely revolutionizes the pottery industry by introducing an unprecedented emphasis on structures that focus on the specific contribution of individuals. This eventually includes the:

imposition of strict and systematic supervision of labor, expansion of the work force, institution of division of labor and task specialization, establishment of a managerial hierarchy, development of a career structure, and introduction of detailed and published rules of production and conduct. (Langton (1984: 345)

Linking salvation, individual calling and hard work proves to be profitable for businesspeople like Wedgwood, because it blesses the pursuit of individual wealth and helps to create a disciplined and motivated workforce. In addition, it also helps create a market for products via legitimizing an economy that values material luxuries (like fine pottery for drinking tea).

**ERA 4: Contemporary “faith at work” movement**

The past century can be characterized by two ideal-types that describe how salvation is understood and linked to modern organizational practices (e.g., see discussion of Faith at Work in Miller, 2007: 24-25, 42, 60; see also Dodd and Gotsis, 2007: 156, and Roelofs, 1988).3 We refer to these as *Personal salvationists* (which includes Pentecostalism, Adventism, and conservative evangelicalism) and *Social salvationists* (which includes liberation theology, radical Anabaptist-Mennonites, and Catholic social thought). In terms of Weber’s three dimensions of salvation, as shown in Table 1, the Personal salvationists are consistent with the orientation associated with Era 3, and the Social salvationists more aligned with Era 1.

*Modality of salvation.* Personal salvationists build on Reformation-era thinking, emphasizing how Jesus offers salvation via his sacrificial death on the cross. In contrast, Social salvationists tend to emphasize Jesus as role model, focusing especially on Jesus’ social teaching and seeking to emulate his counter-cultural example in relevant ways for today (e.g., Guiterez, 1973; Yoder, 1972).

*Instantiation of salvation.* Relative to each other, Personal salvationists tend to place greater emphasis on salvation for the after-life, whereas Social salvationists place greater emphasis on salvation being evident in this world. With regard to this world, Personal salvationists are more likely to view wealth as a sign of God’s blessing (akin to Era 3), whereas Social salvationists place greater emphasis on resource-sharing (akin to Era 1). At its extreme, a Personal salvationist view “preaches the so-called prosperity gospel that promotes riches to all who are faithful” (Miller, 2007: 90; see also Sarles, 1986: 339). Rev. C.A. Dollar, referred to as “a leading apostle” in the prosperity gospel/Word of Faith movement (Luo, 2006) states that

everything you are seeking from God—healing, salvation, eternal life, deliverance and prosperity—has already been given to you through the authority of the name of Jesus … The name of Jesus is your “claim ticket” to the promises of God. (Dollar, 2005)

In contrast, a Social salvationist view promotes actions such as resource-sharing, overcoming exploitative practices, cancellation of debts (e.g. Jubilee USA Network), affordable housing, and reconciliation between dominant and minority cultures. This view of instantiation is consistent with the Social salvationist view on modality: “When work is separated from our faith, we are denying the image in which we were created, which is the beginning of denying our end in salvation” (Naughton, 2006: 42).

*Locus of ethical activity*. Personal salvationists emphasize personal piety and overcoming personal sin. For them the Christian life is largely worked out in the inner life; the outer life is useful for the purification and sustenance of the inner life (Volf, 2001). Their personal locus of ethicality is illustrated by their view of social problems (such as poverty) as being the result of sinful behavior of individuals that require repentance, rather than as institutional or social inequalities that require structural change (McCleary, 2007: 67). Similarly, this view considers personal wealth as confirmation of God’s grace and salvation (Sarles, 1986: 342).

In contrast, Social salvationists place relatively more emphasis on collective salvation via “organizational transformation and social justice in the economic sphere” (Miller, 2007: 60) and promoting “an egalitarian society” (Miller, 2007: 25). Salvation is worked out in community and in cultural transformation. Social salvationists recognize that poverty is not merely nor even mainly personal, but rather largely social and systemic. Social salvationists would also recognize that financial wealth and prosperity may be associated with exploitive practices (e.g., underpaid workers, unsustainable use of ecological resources) rather than a sign of God’s providence.

*Implications for organizational practice.* Personal salvationists largely work within the parameters of contemporary organization and management theory, believing that honest work will be blessed with financial reward. In this way they are consistent with the bulk of workplace spirituality literature, which maintains that spirituality is good for individuals and for business profits (e.g., Lips-Wiersrma, Dean and Fornaciari, 2009). Personal salvationists seek to be honest, live with integrity, work hard, and treat others well. Their concern is with the salvation of individual souls, not social change (Volf, 2001).

Some consider Amway to be an exemplar of a business organized according to the Gospel of Prosperity (Bromley and Shupe, 1990). Amway was founded in 1959 by Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel. That year it had sales of $500, which grew to $1billion within 25 years as it became one of the 300 largest industrial corporations in the USA. The business model is a simple example of a direct sales organization. On the front line are individual distributors, who essentially run their own businesses. Distributors buy product from Amway, and sell it to customers. They also recruit new distributors, and receive a portion of the sales of distributors whom they have recruited. In reflecting on his many achievements, DeVos (2010) says: “All those things may be true, but really I’m a sinner saved by the grace of God” [*modality*].

One key attribute of the nature of the salvation Amway offers is related to *instantiation*. Amway places great emphasis on encouraging its members and new recruits to link their identity to their material well-being in this world (Pratt, 2000: 463). “Material success is viewed to be the sole gateway to attaining nonmaterial desires, such as being a good family member or helping others” (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009: 295). A second key attribute is related to Amway’s *personal* *locus of ethical activity*. The core Amway vision has been presented as a way of “saving” America one person at a time (Lips-Wiersma, et al., 2009; Pratt, 2000: 468). Amway sees itself as a purveyor of the American dream, where any individual can achieve riches. Great emphasis is placed on the fact that start-up costs are very low to become a distributor, thus providing an opportunity for everyone from any walk of life. That said, there is also emphasis on distributorships working as a family, on mutual support across distributors, and on accountability across the different hierarchical levels of distributorships. But at its core, the emphasis on individual business units is amazing in such a large enterprise:

one serves one’s own interests best by serving others. In Amway, leaders and members view “the business” as a means of serving others by offering them a real opportunity to achieve the American dream. … “We believe it’s God’s purpose in our life. We can help people on a material level (as well as ourselves) plus help them in their personal growth and spiritual growth.” … “The economic success attained through Amway in turn is equated with the most fundamental American values, personal freedom.” (Bromley and Shupe, 1990: 247)

In contrast, because Social salvationists are concerned with saving not only a person’s inner life but also the outer created world, they seek to liberate and transform the very structures and value bases of many current business practices. For them, working with God means renewal of all of creation, which compels them to transform oppressive social structures, including those that degrade the natural environment. Thus, mainstream organizational practices are seen as needing change because they promote moral lapses and are based on flawed systems.

The Focolare movement associated with Catholic Social Tradition provides an excellent example of Social salvation organizations in practice. This movement currently includes over 750 businesses from many sectors around the world who are members of an Economy of Communion (Gold, 2010). “The Focolare goes some way to rectifying the often narrow-minded interpretation of ‘salvation’ dominant within certain Catholic traditions” (Gold 2010: 209). In particular, rather than seeking to convert people, it is much more grounded in establishing relationships that value diversity in an ethos of caring and sharing. The Focolare movement seeks to follow the example of Christ (*modality*) and to transform the world beginning here and now (*instantiation*):

For those who share the Focolare spirituality, the main concern in life is not that of converting others to a particular belief pattern or symbolic universe. It lies, above all, in being love [i.e., the presence of Jesus] for other people and where possible creating conditions where reciprocal love can generate the presence of God, regardless of creed or race. (Gold, 2010: 58)

The Economy of Communion is grounded in a social vision of economics as described in Acts 4:32-35 and evident in the Jerusalem Love Community (*social locus of ethical activity*). The following are among the numerous guidelines for business practice that have been developed for this movement: promote initiatives that favor people who are in need (also know as the a preferential option for the poor); organizational structures should be designed to nurture human relationships among stakeholders because people—not work—are at the center of a business; provide safe, healthy and hospitable workplaces; obey the law; and practice participative decision-making (summarized in Gold, 2010).

**DISCUSSION**

Our study builds on Weber’s analysis of change in the understanding of salvation and its implications for organization studies. We develop a three-dimensional conceptual framework and provide an historical analysis of the Western Christian tradition to show how it can be used to assess the meaning of salvation implicit in various organizational practices. We now describe how our framework makes a valuable contribution to future research in the way that it: links organizational practices to salvation; offers a more nuanced understanding of emancipation and its associated organizational practices; provides a basis for developing alternative myths of salvation, emancipation and management; and suggests theological implications for organizational studies more broadly.

**The relationship between salvation and organizing**

Whereas previous research has shown a relationship between religious beliefs and specific ways of organizing and managing, ours is the first to examine how differing understandings of salvation coincide with differing organizational practices over time. Again, neither Weber nor we would claim that there is a direct causal link that goes from religious belief to management. Indeed, the direction of the relationship may often go in the opposite direction (Bay et al, 2010). For example, the shift from Era 1 to Era 2 coincides with the political needs of Constantine for a religion where rules can be administered centrally, and where religious teachings do not subvert the everyday running of the Roman Empire. Similarly, Wedgwood’s business needs are well-served by an understanding of salvation that emphasizes individualism (to facilitate specialization, division of labour) and where the material success in this life are seen as signs of being saved in the after-life (thereby legitimating high profits).

Given the co-occurrence of differing understandings of salvation and differing organizational practices, our analysis using the three dimensional framework may help future researchers identify possible patterns regarding how salvation and organizational practices are related. Toward this end, we believe that our framework offers a sensemaking device (Czarniawska, 1998) that can be used beyond the historical analysis and focus on Christianity presented here. For example, future researchers might find the framework, and possible relationships embedded within it, as useful in extrapolating the link between salvation and the freedom from financial failure within the Muslim world. Is the Islamic view of salvation associated with particular management and organizational practices that have allowed it to largely sidestep the financial difficulties faced by most Western nations? We have also seen that the Muslim world was important in developing and promoting micro-financing. What is the view of salvation of Muhammad Yunus and other Muslim proponents of micro-finance within the Muslim world, and does it help to explain their ability to conceive of and implement micro-financing? Moreover, are there dominant forms of salvation evident in the Muslim world that either enhance or militate against the establishment of Western style democracy in Afghanistan, or the dawning of what is currently known as the Muslim Spring? Other religions could also be explored. For example, what practices in a Buddhist organization are associated with their particular view of salvation? Would their view of salvation and hence their organizational practices be different in a North American context versus a predominantly Buddhist national context?

Examining the diversity of religions will also help to address other shortcoming of the present study, namely that our historical analysis describes only three of the possible eight ideal-type “meanings” of salvation proposed by our 2 x 2 x 2 conceptual framework (modality x instantiation x locus of ethicality). It may be that in practice only these three exist; yet we assume there are others. We would welcome future research that reveals other understandings of salvation, and their associated organizational practices. Moreover, such research may also find additional dimensions to add to our framework.

**Salvation and emancipation**

Our framework and analysis may also be of use for those engaged in research areas that do not have an explicit focus on religious ideas. For example, it may be of special interested to those working in the area of emancipation. While salvation and emancipation are typically used in different contexts with different meanings, it appears that the closest contemporary secular expression for salvation may indeed be emancipation. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 433) note that emancipation has a religious heritage. This is supported by Laclau (1996: 8), who observes that the “discourse of radical emancipation emerged for the first time with Christianity, and its specific form was salvation.” Ratzinger and Habermas (2006: 44-45), in the context of their famous dialogue, also point to this origin of emancipation. Discussing emancipation as well as several other Christian terms which have come to be borrowed by philosophy, Habermas suggests the need for secular literature to “be ready to learn from theology.” Baum (1989: 739) suggests that research guided by “an emancipatory commitment” is a secular perspective analogous to the theologically grounded option for the poor. Greisman and Ritzer (1981: 43, 47) are explicit: insofar as “critical theory aims toward emancipation” it thus represents “a secular theory of salvation.”

Moreover, it appears that Weber’s three dimensions of salvation often play a role when the literature discusses similarities and differences between emancipation and salvation. For example, although Warburton points out that many Marxists would argue that the role religion played in the development of capitalism (Era 3) was “clearly a hindrance to emancipation,” this would not have been the case with an understanding of salvation closer to that of Era 1:

The Judaeo-Christian messianic tradition [e.g., where *modality* = Messiah as role model] offered salvation to the poor and oppressed [*locus of ethical activity* = social] and, insofar as the efforts of religious revolutionaries were aimed at this-worldly [*instantiation* = this world] salvation, they were cited approvingly by Marx and Engels. (Warburton, 1977: 91)

Of course, it is by no means clear whether the sort of emancipation Marx and Engels envision is analogous to a view associated with Era 1. In particular, the modality they envision may be more consistent with that of revolutionary leader who uses force to institute social change, rather than that of an Era 1 leader who uses nonviolent civil disobedience and invites others to join him. This dimension merits further research in terms of how emancipation is conceived in the literature.

That said, perhaps the most interesting point of comparison between salvation and emancipation is in terms of the tension between an individualistic and a collective locus of ethical activity. Several scholars have pointed to the need to address the tension between personal versus social emancipation, and often argue to downplay the individualistic side. For example, Barros (2010: 181) urged that “the contradictory nature of emancipation in regard to its individual and collective ideals should be further studied to analyze how self-interest, masked as autonomy, can hamper emancipatory potential.” Giri (2004: 99) also points to the dangers of “a narrow self-centred view” of emancipation and salvation, and Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 447) point to the costs associated with individuals’ emancipation. Finally, scholars within contemporary Christianity seeking to redress the inordinate emphasis on the individual within the concept of freedom in Christ suggest that freedom is not meant for oneself but for service to others:

For the salvation promised [in the Gospel] is not a life free from suffering, free from servitude, but rather a life that freely suffers, that freely serves, because such suffering and service are hallmarks of the Kingdom established by Jesus. As Christians we do not seek to be free, but rather to be of use, for it is only in serving that we discover the freedom offered by God. For we have learned freedom cannot be had by becoming “autonomous,” free from all claims except those we voluntarily accept, but rather freedom literally comes by having our self-absorption challenged by the needs of another. (Hauerwas, 1986: 69-70)

The overall emphasis among these scholars points to how emancipation may be undermined by a locus of ethical activity that focuses on individuals and their self-interests, rather than on communities of people and society at large.

While brief, this discussion underscores the link between salvation and emancipation, and points to the utility of the three-dimensional conceptual framework for future research in specifying the various understandings of emancipation. Just as there is no universal understanding of salvation, so also there is no one universal understanding of emancipation (Alvesson and Willmot, 1992). And just as differing understandings of salvation are associated with differing organizational practices, we would expect future researchers to find differing understandings of emancipation to be associated with differing organizational practices. This may be especially helpful among Critical Management Studies (CMS), where emancipation is considered to be “a founding value” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 432) and where the “concept of emancipation [has become]…extremely controversial … and gets to the crux of many problems that have recently concerned it” (Fleming and Mandarini, 2009: 333).

**Myths and the Practice of Emancipation**

We noted earlier that salvation may be an expression of a deeply held archetype of suffering/relief common to humanity whose current contemporary secular mythic expression is emancipation. The value of this conceptualization is that myths help us to see the whole as greater than a sum of parts. Myths also provide an underlying meaning and set of ideas that enable humans to answer the most vital questions, and thereby serve to socialize individuals and guide their actions. Myths about salvation and emancipation, then, can be seen to inform organizational practice, and in turn to inform the myth of management itself, which has been described as filling the in-between currently existing as a result of the decline of God in our society and a new unknown mythic path yet to come (Kostera, 2008: 4).

Since there may be several views of salvation within any one religious expression (e.g. Christianity) and certainly across religions, and since there are several expressions of emancipation, a mythic conceptualization provides those who would practice emancipation in their respective contexts an opportunity to articulate a contemporary emancipation myth that provides for a greater degree of relief from suffering. For example, Adler (2011: 4) wonders why “most people see present-day reality through the lens of political myths” rather than examining things for themselves and hence not being pulled into political manipulations (e.g., war in Iraq). Also, why does the financial services industry (and perhaps society more generally) readily adopt the myth that being big means you will not fail? Adler (2011: 4) suggests a different perspective:

‘It’s too big to fail’ has become the pervasive belief among many Americans when considering the fate of their country. Unfortunately, neither the United States nor its economy is too big to fail; no country is. Nor is our planet too big to fail. Nor is our species either too big or too important to fail.

Adler’s point is a poignant and sober call to reframe our lives in new ways. Mythic expression, based on deeply rooted archetypes, is capable of providing us with the means to express a different myth that grounds us within our common humanity.

Perhaps more mundane, though certainly not less important, Adler suggests that in teaching MBAs, we must help them to draw out their humanity and thereby replace the “myths of individualism and greed masquerading as professionalism” (Adler, 2011:10). Our research provides different myths of salvation that can be applied to our current organizational contexts. Rather than the myth of salvation in Era 3 and 4a, which tends to reinforce the myth of individualism and materialism noted by Adler and others (e.g., Dyck and Neubert, 2010), those seeking to practice emancipation from individualism and materialism have the opportunity to embrace a different salvation/emancipation myth and relieve suffering in a new way. We recognize that this will take courage and creativity, since myths of salvation or emancipation (as well as others) require both “archetypal and particularistic elements” (Hatch, et al., 2005: 76) as they are translated into specific cultural settings. Such work may also go a long way in helping to develop the sorts of alternative myths of management called for by a growing number of management scholars, educators and practitioners (e.g., Ghoshal, 2005; Giacalone, 2004; Hamel, 2009; Podolny, 2009). We hope that this research assists with that critical work.

**Implications for contemporary organization studies: The theological turn**

In addition to the conceptual framework and specific implications that flow from our analysis, a larger contribution of our study is to draw attention to the theological discourse inherent in organization studies. For example, besides human suffering and salvation, our discipline addresses the deeper meaning of work, how to treat the relatively powerless, and the purpose of life (and organizations)—all of which are traditional theological issues.

As we have done in this study, there are leading organization scholars and practitioners beginning to use theology as the specific starting point for developing alternative approaches to management theory (e.g. Sandelands, 2010; Hamel, 2009; Dyck and Schroeder, 2005). Such a theological turn allows scholars to develop alternative management theory and practice based on concepts that transcend contemporary management theory. For example, scholars note that it can be difficult to conceive of acts of altruistic benefaction within (secular) contemporary management theory, which is forced to use instrumental language to try to justify them (Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton, 2005: 14). The theological turn, however, opens the door to the *possibility* of altruism and other ideas impossible within a secular paradigm based on rational choice theory and consequential utilitarianism. A theological perspective which recognizes a benevolent God is able to conceive that the lure of altruism may be just as powerful as the lure of profits (see Godbout and Caillé, 1998: 15). Some of the insights found in theological discourse defy being found rationally outside of theology; as Habermas (1991: 79) notes, “intuitions which had long been articulated in religious language can neither be rejected nor simply retrieved rationally” (cited in Harrington, 2007: 46-47). To be clear, the theological turn need not accept sacred scriptures as normative: “Post-metaphysical thinking should be open to learning from religion and at the same remain agnostic” (Habermas, 2005: 149; cited in Harrington, 2007: 54).

Weber foresaw the value of re-embracing the theological. He argued that the contemporary approach was destined to fail in the long term despite its allure, speculating that change would be triggered by ecological factors (perhaps it would remain “until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt,” p. 181) or by the sense of lack of ultimate meaning associated with the iron cage (“the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually gives it the character of sport,” p. 182). He famously observes that of this materialistic-individualistic iron cage it might truly be said: “Specialists *without spirit,* sensualists *without heart*; this nullity imagines that his has attained a level of civilization never before achieved” (Weber, 1958: 182; emphasis added here). Perhaps the time has come for organizational scholars more generally to embrace the theological turn evident among leading philosophers (e.g., Derrida, Habermas, Marion, Vattimo, and Žižek), and give more serious thought to the theology inherently embedded in organization studies (e.g., Bradley, 2006; Harrington, 2007; Simmons, 2008; Westphal, 2006).

**NOTES**

1. Even though the majority of theologians in Era 2 see salvation as ransom or redemption, the idea of salvation coming via following Jesus as role model is not entirely forgotten, as illustrated by Abelard’s (1079-1142) views that resonate with the pre-Constantine era:

Jesus saves by being a revelation and effective demonstration of God's love for humankind. Jesus teaches us and gives us an example of how to love God and our neighbor in response to God. Jesus thus binds human beings to God in love by being God's love towards us and enkindling our love of God and neighbor in return. (Haight, 1994: 237)

2. For example, scholars have noted that the words in Luke 22:19b-20—where Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper saying “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”—may not be found in some of the ancient manuscripts: “Indeed, the early Christian writers who quote Luke’s account of the Last Supper did not know that the verses exist” (Ehrman, 2008: 137; see also Fitzmyer, 1970: 1388, Marshall, 1978: 800ff). As further evidence that Luke did not view Jesus’ death as a ransom, in another section of Luke which follows the same narrative as evident in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Luke does *not* include the verse “the Son of Man came … to give his life as a ransom for many” (compare Luke 22:27, Mark 10:45, and Matt. 20:28; Ehrman, 2008).

3. These two groups correspond roughly to Miller’s (2007) distinction between premillennialists *versus* postmillennialists, Dodd and Gotsis’ (2007: 156) distinction between accommodators *versus* radicals, and Roelofs’ (1988: 550ff) distinction between theisms from a Greek rationalism *versus* a biblical tradition.

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**Table 1: Basic understanding of salvation in leading world religions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Religion** | **Understanding of salvation** | **Description** |
| Buddhism | *Nirvana* | “Salvation is possible for each person … In performing one’s daily activities, a person can become disciplined in detaching him/herself from his/her activities. Through increasing mental consciousness, eventually an individual separates from bodily sufferings and desires. Eventually, *nirvana* is reached by ceasing to be affected by sensations and desires (pain as well as pleasure)” (McCleary, 2007:55). |
| Christianity | Repentance and right relationship with God | Through Jesus, repentant humankind can enjoy a restored right relationship with God (this is often expressed using terms like the grace of God, eternal life and forgiveness of sin) (drawing on McCleary, 2007). |
| Confucianism and Taoism | Disciplined living | “transformation of the mind and shaping external life style” (Wilson, 2002: 121); “The Confucian path to human flourishing, neither a spiritual journey to the other shore nor a salvation in the next life, is rooted in the improvability of this world and this life” (Tu, 1995: 411). |
| Hinduism | Liberation from self | “The goal of salvation for Hindus is the attainment of final liberation *(moksha)* from *samsara* (the life cycle)” (Wilson, 2002: 115); “to Hindus salvation comes when you are finally released from the cycle of death and rebirth” (Albertson, 2009: 62); “Salvation is defined in Hinduism as union with the supreme Brahman, ‘the unchanging reality’, in an enlightened state (*moksa*), where individuals existence ceases” (McCleary, 2007: 53). |
| Islam | Finding refuge in God/Allah | “Salvation in Islam is the forgiveness of sin and the rewarding of obedience and right action” (McCleary, 2007: 60); “Islam means total surrender to God” (Wilson, 2002: 114). |
| Judaism | Wholeness | “In contrast to those religions, which teach salvation as freeing the soul from the material body and material world, Judaism affirms that the created earth is good and is to be celebrated” (Wilson, 2002: 113). Salvation is not individual but collective and ultimately refers to victory over evils that result in the restoration of peace in all relationships, including God, people, and the earth. |
| Sikhism | Grace | *“*Sikhs (literally disciples) consider their faith as emerging as a result of revelation that was received by *gurus* beginning with Guru Nanak” (Wilson, 2002: 119); “Sikhs believe that the true path to salvation and merging with God … one must live that life of a householder, earning an honest living, and avoid temptations and sins” (Albertson, 2009: 80). |

**Table 2: Changes through history in the meaning of salvation across a wide variety of world religions, and associated organizational practices**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Phase* | *Brief description* | *Organizational implications* | *Need for next phase* |
| *Phase 1: Managing the gods* | Gods are seen as spiritual beings who can help humankind, and the way to achieve salvation is to have magicians/sorcerers who “manage” these gods on behalf of villagers. | This phase is associated with a relatively simple social structure. | Magicians are unable to save the people from suffering. |
| *Phase 2: Placating the gods* | Gods are seen as beings whose “egotistic wishes” needed to be placated (Weber, 1968: 432). Salvation is achieved by community members participating in techniques like worship, supplication, prayer, sacrifices, gifts and performance of rites (Weber, 1968: 422-25). During this phase religion and doctrine develop, as distinct from magic. | This phase produces the first specialists in religion to coordinate and perform the various rituals and sacraments. | Humankind is unable to adequately placate the gods to alleviate suffering. |
| *Phase 3: Focus on transcen-dent ethics* | Recognition that salvation cannot be achieved via the natural realm (which the gods had created, but which they lack desire or perhaps capacity to change), but rather via the transcendent realm of the gods through ethical behavior. | The development of orderly judicial systems within relatively stable socio-political contexts. | Suffering persists; too many com-peting ethical systems among gods. |
| *Phase 4: Amalga-mation via a prophet* | Shift toward monotheism (away from the pantheism of the previous phases), often coinciding with the advent of a prophet who is able to take previous disparate teachings and pull them together into a unified, consolidated new path to salvation (Kalberg, 2001: 301, 316). Within the Western Christian tradition this prophet is Jesus of Nazareth (e.g., Luke 24:19). | The prophet is associated with relatively simple (often counter-cultural) organizational structures. | Teachings of prophet need further elaboration, perhaps due to changes in context. |
| *Phase 5: Elabora-tion and accom-modation* | Subsequent religious leaders interpret, codify and integrate the teachings of the prophet, thereby forming “the foundational tenets of ethical salvation doctrines that promised redemption from suffering” (Kalberg, 2001: 302). The understanding of salvation may change as a prophet’s teachings are (re)interpreted over time (e.g., whereas a prophet may initially have been viewed as a *role model* for how to live a salvific life, over time prophet may be seen as *means* to a heavenly after-life). | The universaliza-tion associated with this phase typically coincides with centralization in the socio-political (and economic) realms. | Dysfunctions may occur due to coopting between religious elite and economic-political elite. |

**Table 3: Key eras of Christian understandings of salvation, and implications for organizational practices**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **ERA 1:**  **Biblical and early church fathers** | **ERA 2:**  **Post-Constantine and Middle Ages** | **ERA 3:**  **Reformation and Protestant Ethic** | **ERA 4a + 4b:**  **Contemporary “faith at work” movement** | |
| **4a. Personal Salvationists** | **4b. Social Salvationists** |
| ***Key***  ***exemplars***  ***A. Three dimensions of salvation*** | Luke, Ireneaus, Origen | Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Anselm, (Abelard) | Luther, Calvin, Baxter (as interpreted by Weber) | Dollar | Guiterez, Yoder |
| *1) Modality: Jesus as role model vs as sacrifice* | Role model | Sacrifice | Sacrifice | Sacrifice | Role model |
| *2) Instantiation: Relative emphasis on where salvation is evident (this world vs after-life)* | This world:  Demonstrated in resource sharing; inclusivity/ welcoming the socially marginalized | After-life:  Performing sacraments;  asceticism/  monasteries | After-life:  Resources as confirmation of salvation (rational rules for daily life taken from monasteries) | After-life:  Resources as confirmation of salvation/ blessing | This world: Put into practice via sharing resources |
| *3) Locus of ethical activity: personal vs social* | Social | Social (*extra ecclesia nulla salus*) | Personal (individual calling) | Personal | Social |
| ***B. Implications for organization practice*** |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Key principles* | Sharing financial resources, community | Centralization, rationalization | Rationaliza-tion, profit maximization | Honest work is blessed with financial reward | Develop redemptive structures & systems |
| *Exemplary practitioners* | Jerusalem Love Community (James) | St. Benedict Rules of monastery (Catholicism) | Josiah Wedgwood (Puritans) | Amway (Gospel of Prosperity) | Focolare Movement (Radical/ liberation theology) |