**GOD ON MANAGEMENT:**

**THE WORLD’S LARGEST RELIGIONS,**

**THE ‘THEOLOGICAL TURN,’**

**AND ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This chapter reviews research published in secular management journals that examines what the world’s largest religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism and Islam) say about management. In terms of *how* religion informs management, the literature identifies two basic means: (1) written scriptures (e.g., Analects, Bible, Quran) and (2) experiential spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, mindfulness). In terms of *what* religion says about management, the emphasis tends to be either on (1) enhancing, or (2) liberating mainstream management. Studies based on scriptures typically *either* enhance or liberate management, whereas empirical research based on spiritual disciplines consistently point to liberation. Implications are discussed.

**INTRODUCTION**

The goal of the present chapter is twofold: to review the secular management literature with regards to what five leading world religions say about management, and to draw out implications for future research in the area. World-wide interest in religion is strong and growing. Approximately 80 percent of the world follows one of the five leading religions examined in this chapter—Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam—and this number is expected to grow to about 85 percent by 2050 (Johnson, 2010; see also Kriger and Seng, 2005). Interest in spirituality and religion varies within countries; for example in the USA over 50 percent of Americans pray more than once a day outside of formal religious services (Vitell, Paolillo and Singh, 2006).

Although interest in religion and its implication for management is growing (e.g., Chan-Serafin, Brief and George, forthcoming; Dyck and Wiebe, 2012; Tracey, 2012), the study of the influence of religion on management theory and practice is not particularly well developed. “Even though religion plays a significant role in the lives and interactions of individuals, societies, and nations, the management field has only lightly and narrowly explored how religion's influence manifests in the workplace” (King, 2008: 214).

This chapter reviews the secular management literature that looks at how religion can and has influenced management theory and practice. By way of introduction to the chapter, the review identified three overarching themes that help to understand this literature. First, the five religions share in common some sort of understanding of a deity, divine being or transcendent other. Thus, in shorthand the chapter is entitled “God on management.” Second, the articles tend to focus on one of two “means” by which religions have something to say about management: (1) written scriptures (e.g., ancient writings and holy texts), and (2) experiential spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, mindfulness). Finally, in terms of *what* the articles say, about half (45 percent) of the articles argue that religious ideas enhance mainstream management theory and practice, and the other half (55 percent) argue that religion calls for new liberating, radical forms of management.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into four parts. The first part draws from classic arguments by Max Weber through to the current “theological turn” to describe the relevance and importance of the present chapter, and presents a 2x2 conceptual framework that will guide the subsequent presentation. The second part describes the methodology used to select studies for the current study. The third part describes how the articles in the study fit into the 2x2 framework, and the final part describes implications for future research.

**From MAX Weber to the “theological turn”**

It is helpful to start by clarifying what literature is *not* being reviewed here. This chapter will review research that examines the effect of “religion” or “God” on management, not vice versa. As a result, the research reviewed here differs from most of the studies that look at religion published in leading management journals (e.g., *Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management Studies, Strategic Management Journal*), which tend to focus on how management theory and practice influence or promote a better understanding of religion and religious organizations (cf. Tracey, 2012). For example, Bartunek (1984) and Bartunek and Ringuest (1989) use organization theory to describe changes in a Roman Catholic Women’s order; Miller (2002) uses strategy theory to look at religious organizations; Dyck and Starke (1999) use EVLN theory to describe the formation of breakaway congregations; Stanley (1981) uses religious organizations to illustrate aspects of dissent theory; Weaver and Agle (2002) use symbolic interactionism to understand the relationship between managers’ religious identities and ethics; Kieser (1987) describes how medieval monasteries illustrate the negative feedback loops associated with the iron cage; Nelson (1993) examines organizational outcomes of three multinational churches to explore the relationship between Weber's three types of authority, organizational form and societal environment; and King and Haveman (2008) examine the antislavery movement using theory from social institutions and communications networks (noting how the theological beliefs of religious groups influenced whether or not they supported abolition). Some articles refer to how traditional religious ideas have been integrated into conventional theory, including analysis of how contemporary work organizations are adopting roles and attributes once performed by religious organizations (Bowles, 1989), how excellent companies are much like successful religious sects (Soeters, 1986), and how a religious tone helps to strengthen corporate cultures (Ackers and Preston, 1997, who question whether this it is ethical for a business organization to claim the “soul” of its members). As a whole, such studies may be enriching for both theory development and practice, but they place little emphasis on examining how religion informs management theory (and they rarely refer to a deity).

In contrast, rather than describe how management theory can inform and improve our understanding of religious organizations and issues, this chapter focuses on research that describes how religion can inform management theory. In other words, in the studies reviewed here management theory and practice are the dependent variables. Such a focus is entirely consistent with both the history of our academic discipline, and with the “theological turn” taking place among leading philosophers.

In terms of the historical foundations of organization analysis, ever since Max Weber (1958, orig. 1903) wrote his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* there has been widespread agreement among scholars that conventional management theory and practice were initially underpinned by a particular, *long-since secularized,* religious moral-point-of-view (e.g., Dyck and Schroeder, 2005; Golembiewski, 1989; Herman, 1997; Hershberger, 1958; Jackall, 1988; Nash, 1994; Naughton and Bausch, 1994; Novak, 1996; Pattison, 1997; Pfeffer, 1982; Redekop, Ainlay and Siemens, 1995). Weber noted that the hallmarks of this conventional approach—namely, its emphasis on individualism and materialism—had long lost their grounding in religious forces (e.g., Weber, 158: 72) and had encaptured society in an “iron cage.” What is of particular importance for the present chapter, but has often been overlooked is that Weber, though agnostic, argued that escape from the materialistic-individualistic “iron cage” demanded a radical approach to management based on “a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals” or “entirely new prophets” (1958: 182, see also pages 277-8; see also MacIntyre’s (1981: 263) similar argument that overcoming “bureaucratic individualism” require new and “doubtless very different” prophets).

Thus, already a century ago Weber (1958: 181-82) pointed to the merit in re-embracing the theological in order to escape the iron cage. He argued that mainstream approaches to management and organization theory were destined to fail due to their inherent lack of ultimate meaning (“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”) and due to ecological concerns (the iron cage would need to be replaced once “the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt”). As he put it, of this secular materialistic-individualistic iron cage it can truly be said: “Specialists *without spirit,* sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that his has attained a level of civilization never before achieved [emphasis added here].” Taken together, Weber points to the horizontal dimension of the 2x2 conceptual framework (see below) that will be used to review the literature, namely, the question of whether religion is being used to (1) support conventional management theory versus (2) point toward a qualitatively different kind of management theory.

Today Weber’s ideas about the importance of the theological—that is, the merit in studying “God on management”—are perhaps most evident in the “theological turn” evident among leading philosophers in continental Europe. In simple terms, the theological turn points to the value of developing social theory on the assumption that there is an altruistic god, even if one believes that such a god does not exist (Hodge, 2007: 175; “Post-metaphysical thinking should be open to learning from religion and at the same remain agnostic,” Habermas, 2005: cited in Harrington, 2007: 54).

In general terms the “theological turn” can be seen as having two characteristics (the following discussion draws from Dyck, 2013). First, even if I as a scholar do not believe in a deity or some transcendent other, if other people experience God as a real phenomenon, then this already makes the phenomenon of a deity worthy of study. To pretend otherwise is to suggest that my life experiences are complete and more true than the experiences of others. By way of analogy, just because I have never experienced what it is like to be “in love” does not mean that being “in love” is not real or worthy of study.

Second, even if we were all to agree that there is no loving God (or even if we are all undecided), there still may be merit for purposes of theory development to assume that there is. According to some leading phenomenologists it is difficult to theorize about altruism in the absence of an altruistic deity because, without a benevolent and loving God, everything can be reduced to self-interested behavior, or at best enlightened self-interests. Thus the theological turn enables humankind to conceive of, imagine and theorize about concepts like altruism and genuine benefaction, concepts that have proven difficult to conceive within the conventional instrumental management paradigm (e.g., Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton, 2005: 14). The theological turn opens the door to the *possibility* of altruism and other ideas that are impossible within a secular paradigm based on consequential utilitarianism and rational choice theory. For example, a theology premised on the idea of a benevolent God is able to conceive the lure of altruism being more powerful than the lure of profits (Godbout and Caillé, 1998: 15). In short, the theological turn permits the development of management theory and practice that takes into account messages from a deity (Weber, 1958: 182) that lie outside of secular paradigms (e.g., see Simmons, 2008: 919-20).

This assumption of a loving deity represents a shift in the basic fundamentals of building social theory. By way of illustration, note the implications of such a theological turn for everyday relationships and actions. As Simmons (2008: 920) describes, because of the theological turn we can see God looking at us “in the face of the other” (Levinas), to see God humbly hoping for our “works of love and justice” (Derrida), and to hear God calling to us “in the voice and touch of the Other” (Chrétien). These basic observations and orientations result in concepts and ideas that are inconceivable from a secular worldview. As Juergen 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). Simmons (2008: 919; italics in original) continues:

“For Marion, God is the absolutely self-given pure gift of love. This gift is not presented with the expectation of payback (i.e., according to an economic logic), but instead is an-economic. It is pure givenness (*donation*) without return. Henry claims that according to Christianity all humans exist in the condition of being ‘sons’ of God according to the ‘truth of life’. This status requires a radical rupture of the power-relations that obtain according to the objectifying tendencies constitutive of the ‘truth of the world’. In pure life, as sons, all beings are constituted in their relation to God/Life as such and not according to their socio-economic, gendered, raced, sexed, identity. This is not to say that these identity markers are not radically important, but merely that in relation to God, our relations to others are bathed in the light of other-service and not self-interest. Similarly, Lacoste proposes a ‘kenotic treatment of the question of man’ in which the self is established precisely in its being dispossessed *from itself*. This dispossession is a fundamental challenge to all egoism and arrogance. Overcoming these self-interested dispositions is hard work and Lacoste contends that our task is to live towards the ‘kingdom of heaven’ in which the relation of self, God, and others is able to come into absolute harmony” (Simmons, 2008: 919; italics in original).

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that leading luminaries in management are echoing Weber’s emphasis to turn toward theology to develop qualitatively different kind of management theory. For example, in a recent article Gary Hamel (2009) describes a veritable who’s who of management scholars and practitioners who met to discuss how to escape “Management 1.0” (the conventional approach that has characterized the past century or more) and to invent “Management 2.0.” It is striking that these management leaders too point to the merit in looking to “theology” to develop Management 2.0 (Hamel, 2009: 93, 94). The growing interest in the areas of spirituality and religion among scholars and in the general public is also evident in the Academy of Management’s “*Management, Spirituality and Religion*” interest group, started more than a decade ago.

The promise of such a theological approach, which we might call a “theology of management”—or more provocatively “God on management”—is evident in the articles of the five leading world religions reviewed here. Each of these religions has some sort of understanding of a divine being or a “higher power”—for example, Skanda, Yahweh, T’ien or Shangdi, Vishnu, and Allah—which for the sake of simplicity will here be subsumed under the general heading of “god.” Of course the goal in this chapter is not to argue that there is a common understanding of God shared by these religions, for clearly there are important differences. The chapter is entitled “God on management” as a shorthand way of saying that each of these religions has some sort of an understanding of a deity that has implications for management theory and practice.

Before proceeding to the next section, note that the literature is not blind to the observation that the question of God on management can have a dark side, and that history shows that negative things can occur when people genuinely (though perhaps wrongly) believe themselves to be acting according to their understanding of God’s will (e.g., Chan-Serafin, Brief, and George, forthcoming; Lips-Wiersma, Dean and Fornaciari, 2009). This is not the place to address these concerns, except to say that just because these dangers are real does not means that we should stop studying what God says about management. Analogously, just because it can be dangerous for people fall “in love” with others does not mean we should stop doing so (but we should not do so recklessly).

**Common themes across the literature: A 2x2 conceptual framework**

Although this was not apparent prior to the study, during the course of analyzing the literature two key dimensions emerged that were helpful for categorizing the articles. These two dimensions give rise to the 2x2 conceptual framework, shown in Figure 1, which will be briefly described in order to facilitate the presentation of the review.

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First, as indicated on the vertical dimension of Figure 1, the review showed that the articles tended to focus on one of two “means” by which religions have something to say about management. The first way is via ancient writings and holy texts. Bartunek (2006) poetically talks about the “word” of scripture becoming the “flesh” of management practices. The religious scriptures in the literature are typically ancient written texts about or by “prophets” (literally “messengers of God”) or particularly wise religious gurus and leaders. These texts include the Dhamma or Vinaya Pitaka, Christian Bible, Analects, Bhagavad Gita, and the Quran. For simplicity, these are called religious “scriptures” (Figure 1). In the sample of articles reviewed here, scriptures were the most common means through which religion had something to say about management (about 80 percent of the articles). The second way that religion talks to management is via a variety of experiential spiritual practices—such as prayer, meditation and mindfulness—that are designed to help followers live according to the ways of their religion (about 20 percent of articles). In Figure 1 these are placed under the general heading of “spiritual practices.” Note that these spiritual practices have a first-hand experiential quality, compared to what may be seen as a more second-hand quality associated with the writings of prophets.

This simple dichotomy—scriptures versus spiritual practices—is consistent with the larger literature that identifies five core dimensions of religiosity (Stark and Glock, 1968). An emphasis on *scriptures* overlaps with intellectual and ideological dimensions (knowledge of doctrine, beliefs about God), whereas an emphasis on *spiritual practices* overlaps with experiential and ritual dimensions (communication with a divine power, religious sacraments). In terms of their implications for management, both the scriptural and the spiritual include a consequential dimension (connecting religious and work-related religious beliefs, practices and experiences). Engaging meaningfully with these dimensions promises to “provide management researchers with an important opportunity to move work in this area forward” (Tracey, 2012: 26; see also Bréchon, 2007). Note also how the idea of spiritual disciplines as used in this chapter is not inconsistent with how the management literature describes spirituality, which is generally understood to have three core dimensions: (1) connectedness with some kind of “higher power;” 2) a holistic integration of different aspects of life; and (3) and a sense of growth and direction (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003; Tracey, 2012: 29).

Where the vertical dimension in Figure 1 refers to *how* God speaks *to* management (i.e., via scriptures versus spiritual practices), the horizontal dimension refers to *what* God says *about* management. Consistent with Weber’s observations noted earlier, the articles can be divided into two groups. About half of the articles argue that religion enhances mainstream management theory, and the other half argue that religion offers liberation from and an alternative to mainstream theory. The articles that argue religious ideas are basically supportive of conventional management theory and practice often offer ways to improve it or make it more ethical or honest. In Figure 1 these are called “enhancement” articles because they support the status quo, and provide a moral and religious basis with which to understand and improve mainstream management. Many of these articles argue that it was not only the “Protestant ethic” that is consistent with conventional approaches to business management; other religious traditions offer similar foundations and support for the status quo. Second, slightly more than half of the articles argue that religion calls for radical new forms of management that transform conventional emphases on self-interests and financial wealth maximization (iron cage). In Figure 1 these are called “liberation” because they support alternatives to mainstream management (e.g., as called for by Weber, 1958; Hamel, 2009).

**METHOD**

Three different steps were used to search for and identify articles for this review. The first step involved searching for terms like “religion/religious” in leading journals in the organization sciences (*Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies,* and *Organization Studies*). This yielded a total of 39 articles, of which 17 articles had only a passing emphasis on religion of religious concerns (e.g., several survey-based studies reported that they had controlled for religion). Of the remaining 22 articles, most were articles that used conventional organization and management theory to analyze religions and religious organizations (rather than vice versa).

The second method step involved a larger group of 32 journals (see Table 1a) and a broader group of search words related to the world’s largest religions: Buddhism (which has about 470 million followers); Chinese folk religion (about 460 million followers; the focus in this study was on Confucianism), Christianity (about 2.3 billion adherents), Hinduism (about 950 million followers), and Islam (about 1.6 billion followers) (figures taken from Johnson, 2010: lix). Of course, limiting our sample to these five meant excluding other influential religions (e.g., Sikhs with 25 million followers, Judaism with 15 million followers and of clear importance to the religious heritage of both Islam and Christianity). For each of the five religions in our study, a Research Assistant used EBSCO to search for the name of the religion, its key sacred texts, and its key exemplars and primary leader(s) and god(s) (see Table 1b). This resulted in 83 articles that had a relatively strong focus on religious issues. When sorted among the five religions, Buddhism was the primary focus in 7 articles, Christianity in 46 articles, Confucianism in 21 articles, Hinduism in 1 article, and Islam in 4 articles (with the remaining articles focused on multiple religions). Interestingly, there were studies within each religion along both dimensions of *how* God speaks to management (scripture, spirituality) and *what* God says about (enhancement, liberation) (the one exception being the lack of a specific study of Hinduism and “spiritual practices”). Of the articles collected by this method, 50 were published in an ethics journal (*Journal of Business Ethics, Business Ethics Quarterly*), 11 in a practitioner journal (*Harvard Business Review, California Management Review, Sloan Management Review*), 7 in a teaching journal, and the remainder in more general management journals.

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The third step was to specifically search for additional “spirituality” research, in particular studies that provided *empirical* data regarding the effects of using disciplines like mindfulness, prayer and meditation. This included undertaking more general searches using Google Scholar, using search terms like “prayer or meditation and management or business,” which brought to 11 the number of “spiritual practices” studies relevant to this study.

While the search was not exhaustive, enough articles were reviewed to be fairly confident that the four-part framework shown in Figure 1 provides an appropriate way to categorize this literature. By way of quick overview, articles in the “scriptural enhancement” quadrant basically show how religious writings support and enhance the mainstream management theory and practice. Research in the “scriptural liberation” quadrant uses religious writings to critique conventional management theory and provide a foundation for developing alternative theory. Studies in the “spiritual liberation” quadrant describe how the practice of spiritual disciplines results in liberation from mainstream management. And the final quadrant, “spiritual enhancement,” is for research that shows how spiritual practices support and enhance conventional management theory and practice.

The next section will review the studies found in each of the four different quadrants in turn, presenting in alphabetical order each religious tradition and the research associated with it. Of course, in any review of the literature such as this there is need to summarize arguments and thus lose some of the subtleties of the original articles, but below is an attempt to briefly present the articles in terms of the 2x2 framework.

**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

**Scripture-Enhancement quadrant**

The articles in this quadrant argue that modern interpretations of ancient religious writings are compatible with and serve to fine-tune conventional organization and management theory and practice.

***Buddhism.*** Niles (1999) provides a good example of a Buddhist article in the scripture-enhancement quadrant, as she goes to considerable lengths to argue that the ethic of hard work is not unique to the Protestants. She provides empirical support for this by showing that the work ethic (measured via Protestant Work Ethic scales) is higher among Buddhists in Sri Lanka than among Christians in Australia. Similarly, she refers to research findings among Confucian, Muslim and Hindu practitioners suggesting that “most world religions share some common work-related beliefs” (Niles, 1999: 858). By emphasizing the similarities among religions, a sub-text of the article is that a conventional approach to management is compatible with Buddhism and with other leading world religions: “an appropriate attitude to work seems to be universal” (Niles, 1999: 858-59).

Piker (1993) is an excellent example of a scripture-enhancement article that explicitly shows how Buddhism’s apparent counter-cultural teachings can be and have been overcome. He describes how—“with the help of a little tinkering” (p. 967)—Theravada Buddhism (once “the enemy of economic development,” p. 966) has become compatible with economic development. For example, in the past few decades there has been a decline in worshipping the goddess Pattini (a loyal, supportive and nurturant wife whose identity was configured by her husband) and an increase in worshipping the previously-minor goddess Kali (“preeminently a goddess of power and effectiveness”) (Piker, 1993: 970). Similarly the god of Skanda—“a figure of amoral effectiveness and power”—has experienced a huge leap in popularity and become the god of the businessperson (Piker, 1993: 970). He also describes the development of what some of have called “Protestant Buddhism.” Far from lamenting such “tinkering” with Buddhist teachings, Piker describes these adaptations to modern-day economic realities in positive terms, arguing that they help to explain the durability of this religion over time. To support his case, Piker describes how similar adaptations within the Roman Catholic church have also helped it to adapt to contemporary economic theory and practice.

A similar transformation in the interpretation of scriptures is evident in Gould (1995) who also begins by describing a series of Buddhist teachings that seem to call for the development of a counter-cultural approach to management, but then goes on to emphasize the compatibility between Buddhism and the conventional management theory ostensibly based on a Protestant ethic. He notes that he is “not looking at a set of ethical concerns that are much different from the Judeo-Christian tradition” (Gould, 1995: 63).

***Christianity.*** Given Weber’s (1958) argument that a Protestant ethic underpins conventional management theory, it is not surprising that many scripture-enhancement articles argue that Christian values are consistent with conventional management theory. For example, Campbell (1957: 44) asserts that: “the free-enterprise system most nearly complies with the religious principles and is at the same time the most productive.” Jones (1997) offers a review of the empirical literature on the Protestant ethic to basically support the idea that it is consistent with mainstream management theory and practice. Lee, McCann and Ching (2003) provide examples of Christian ethical behavior, all of which would be consistent with what Westerners would think of as professional management. McMahon (1991) essentially argues that profits were acceptable to Catholics even prior to the Protestant Reformation, and Quattrone (2004) argues that the discipline of accounting was developed and informed by the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, based on religious and economic and political and social factors, influenced by an emphasis on individualism (a Protestant invention) and holism (consistent with the traditional Catholic emphasis on the unity of the church).

Equally common are articles that draw from the biblical narrative to develop principles that can be applied toward improving ethics within conventional management (Pava, 2002). For example, Jones (1976) draws practical tips for modern managers from the biblical story of Joseph and the Pharaoh; Ludwig and Longenecker (1993) use the story of David and Bathsheba to point to how to manage dangers associated with personal and organizational success; Rodgers and Gago (2006) seek to modify decision-making models to make organizations more ethical; Rossouw (1994) provides guidance on how to apply Christian ethics in the workplace (which could be used to support enhancement or liberation); Molyneaux (2003: 260) shows how meekness is not inconsistent with conventional management best practices; Light (2001) suggests that financial success is fine if accompanied by philanthropy; Whittington, Pitts, Kagel and Goodwin (2005) draw leadership lessons from the Apostle Paul; and Ali, Camp and Gibbs (2000) draw lessons from the Ten Commandments that can be applied to business (they also identify implications for Islam).

Several articles draw on Catholic writings to critique and fine-tune existing business practices. In an article published over 70 years ago in *Harvard Business Review,* Dempsey (1937: 66) refers to the Pope’s 1931 encyclical on labor and capital (which essentially supports the idea of unions: “Capital cannot do without labour, nor can labour do without capital. Let them settle their differences in representative assemblies”) to remind business leaders to consider the needs of their workers because this is “worthy of consideration of thoughtful American business men [sic], who, mindful of their great responsibility, are concerned with defending our people from communistic revolution and bureaucratic evolution” (p. 66). Since then a number of articles have shown how Christian critiques of the status quo can be deflected or integrated into conventional organizational and management theory and practice (Childs, 1997; Ibrahim, Rues, McDougal and Greene, 1991: 124; Steinfels, 1988: 411; Wren, 2000).

***Confucianism*.** Although most of the Confucian articles fall into the scripture-liberation quadrant, there were some articles that went to considerable lengths to emphasize the compatibility between Confucianism and conventional management. Perhaps most notably, Romar (2004b: 199, 208) argues that Peter. F. Drucker, “the founder of modern American management … chose Confucianism as the ethical foundation for his work.” Elsewhere Romar notes that “Confucianism is compatible with accepted managerial practices” (Romar, 2002:119). Cheung and Chan (2005: 58) describe how the practices of CEOs following Confucian teachings “do not contradict those noted in the West.” Chan (2008: 351) notes that “There is no necessary incompatibility between Confucian ethics and Capitalism.”

***Hinduism*.** Our search found only one article that focused on Hinduism (Barnett, 1985; other articles that refer to Hinduism include Niles, 1999, and Yong, 2008). Barnett (1985) describes how Hinduism draws attention to the foolishness of conventional business (see scripture-liberation quadrant), but rather than describe how a Hinduism model of enlightenment can help to escape this foolishness, Barnett instead seems to say that a Hindu perspective can provide spiritual meaning to conventional business. In particular, he suggests that by seeing “business life” as one of four stage in life—student, householder (includes business world), withdrawal from material world, retirement from life—business life can be viewed as a key component of one’s larger spiritual journey. “By fulfilling the role of householder, one understood and then grew beyond the pursuit of wealth and sensual pleasure” (Barnett, 1985: 58). Barnett suggests that the essence of “the householder model is reflected in many Western concepts” and that the four Hindu stages of life are appropriate for contemporary times because of their “compatibility with [today’s] cultural values” (Barnett, 1985: 59, 62).

The echo of a similar line of argument is evident in Niles (1999: 858) who notes that, although Hinduism is often perceived to be incompatible with conventional management (Hinduism “is irrational and lacking in the essence of the Protestant work ethic”), in actuality “the core Indian personality could be individualistic because the religions of India teach that ultimately salvation has to be an individual process.” Thus, overall Niles (1999) emphasizes the enhancement nature of Hinduism and on overcoming its counter-cultural stereotype.

***Islam*.** Abeng (1997) sketches out an approach to management based Islamic ethics, showing how Islamic distinctives can be seen to enhance and be compatible with conventional management. However, Abeng (1997) also alludes to the importance of a scripture-liberation perspective by starting with a recognition of the tensions between the need for modern business and the shortcomings of capitalism:

“Capitalism, as the main driver of modern business today, in itself is based on a foundation which many regard as a dubious morality. Profit maximization, practiced by many entrepreneurially driven business leaders, tends to lead to unfair distribution of resources and pushes at the ethical boundaries. Nevertheless … modern society and the global world cannot deny the role of business—in leading better life for humankind” (Abeng, 1997: 48).

Help in resolving this tension comes from noting that Islam not only permits, but actually:

“encourages Muslims to do business. The prophet of Islam was himself a full-time businessman for a considerable period of time. However, contemporary Muslims find themselves confronted with serious dilemmas. Despite their active participation, they are not sure whether some of their business practices are valid or not. It is not the business *per se* that has confused them, but rather the brand new forms, institutions, methods and techniques of modern business” (Abeng, 1997: 48).

Abeng then draws from contemporary Islamic business towards identifying seven ethical principles for business people that “are all commended by the Islamic imperative” (Abeng, 1997: 48, 49). While these principles may have a liberating counter-cultural dimension (e.g., “maximizing profits” is not listed among them), the business practices they are described to give rise to do not seem inconsistent with conventional management theory, such as:

“1. Fulfillment of promises (pacts and contracts—or verbal and written)

2. Exactness in weights and measures (specifications) in all business related items including work, wages and payment, and labor movement

3. Truthfulness, sincerity and honesty. While lying and cheating are condemned, the quality of truthfulness, sincerity and honesty is not only commended but commanded by the Quran (Quran 55:7-9 and 83:1-6)

4. Efficiency, i.e., jobs should be carried out without any lapse or omission, with best planning and to be the best of their efficiency and competency

5. Selection of merit. The Quranic standard of eligibility is the required merit and competency for the job (Quran 28:26)

6. Investigation and verification. They are essential because they constitute a prelude for the right and ethical conduct. The Quran commands to probe and verify any given statement or piece of information before making a decision or taking any action accordingly (Quran 17:36, and 49:6)” (Abeng, 1997: 51).

When the seven Islamic principles are applied to everyday business transactions, their counter-cultural edge seems to largely disappear. Indeed, Abeng (1997: 52) states that “competitive position is the only relevant way to measure success, and for that matter, survival in business.”

“To manage competition, business leaders must be able to possess relative efficiency which, to a great extent, is a function of human resource competence. Therefore, the greatest challenge faced by business leaders today is the development, in the right direction, of human resources to alleviate the negative impact of competitive environment. At the end, this will bring wealth and prosperity to humankind which in the Islamic teaching is a noble proposition” (Abeng, 1997: 54).

In an article that can be less ambiguously located in the scripture-enhancement quadrant, Essers and Benschop (2009) describes how Islamic teachings have changed over time to accommodate to contemporary understandings of entrepreneurial success. Finally, Wright (1981) suggests that Western business people can accommodate distinctive Islamic business practices.

**Summary**. Taken together, the articles in this quadrant use religious scriptures to enhance or fine-tune conventional management theory and practice. Given the legacy of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, perhaps it should not come as a surprise that almost two-thirds of the articles in this quadrant are written from a Christian perspective. And similarly, in light of Weber’s work, it may not be surprising that articles from the perspective of other religions often explicitly address the (ostensibly Weberian) idea that their scriptures do not support conventional management. Moreover, about one-fifth of the articles in this quadrant are quite explicit in describing how their religions have adapted over time to become more consistent with mainstream management theory and practice. To be clear, many of the articles do not give unquestioned support to the status quo; rather, many of them critique that status quo in order to show how it can be improved upon. But the critique calls for “fixes” that do not call for fundamental changes to the conventional management paradigm.

**Scripture-Liberation quadrant**

Research in this quadrant describes how religious scriptures challenge the conventional management paradigm, and point to the need to develop a radical counter-cultural approach to management.

***Buddhism.*** Although Piker (1993) has been presented as a scripture-enhancement article, he starts his article by reviewing several studies that suggest that (traditional) Buddhist teachings are not receptive to capitalism and conventional management:

“Theravada Buddhism is the enemy of economic development, often for the same reasons that Weber himself posited in this connection, viz., the irreducible other-worldliness of its salvation ethic, the pervasive ostensible consequence of which is the devaluation of all things worldly, including especially economic activity” (Piker, 1993: 966).

Similarly, although Gould (1995) has been presented as an example of a scripture-enhancement article, he also starts his article by describing a number of ways that Buddhist teachings seem to call for the developmental of a radical approach to management. He places particular emphasis on compassion, which he describes as “intending to act in an altruistic spirit to help others” and as involving “not only not stealing wealth but [also] sharing your wealth with others” (p 64):

“In Buddhism the idea of seeing everyone as one's mother or father is a central way of extending compassion to all people. If everyone is seen this way, then we naturally feel compassion for them, much as we do for our actual mothers and fathers who bore and cared for us as children” (Gould, 1995: 65).

Such an emphasis on fictive kinship relationships seems to challenge basic ideas in conventional business theory that: (a) treats others as competitors, not as family, and (b) finds it difficult to theorize about altruism.

***Christianity.*** Several articles explicitly draw on Weber’s framework and show how specific Christian teachings can be interpreted to lend support to *either* conventional *or* to radical management theory (where “radical” refers to a relative de-emphasis on materialism and individualism). For example, Dyck and Schroeder (2005) show how four biblical virtues—love, submission, obedience, and non-worldliness—have been interpreted in a way that supports the Protestant ethic view of management (Weber, 1958), and how they can be interpreted differently to provide support for a radical view (empirical support consistent with this latter interpretation is found in Dyck and Weber, 2006). Dyck, Starke and Dueck (2009) describe how the Parable of the Talents can be interpreted to lend support to either a conventional or a radical perspective.

Other articles that also recognize a tension within Christianity regarding conventional versus radical management include De George (1986: 427) who suggests that:

“within Christianity there has long been a tension with respect to business. On the one hand the protestant work ethic teaches preaches diligence and thrift, and promises commensurate rewards. On the other hand the Christian message teaches that one should not pay too much attention to money, good, material things” (de George, 1986: 427).

Johnson (1957: 68, 76; emphasis in original) refers to a similar tension between (counter-cultural) Christian teachings and conventional approaches to commercial life:

“Christian doctrines do, in fact, offer a [counter-cultural] perspective from which to view modern commercial life, and this perspective *can make a difference* in the decisions and actions of businessmen. They are relevant in that they can help him chose the ‘best’ (not necessarily the ‘correct’) alternative in a given situation … Businessmen holding this [more radical] viewpoint would, for example, be less likely to commit the idolatry of worshiping the business enterprise, economic system, or career as the ultimate of existence.”

Roels (1997: 113) also reflects this tension when discussing the differences between Christians who adhere to a “prosperity gospel” approach to commerce versus those who don’t:

“[Some Christians] accept prosperity theology as their model for relating business and faith. They frequently state that the level of God's blessings is directly related to the strength of one's faithfulness. Thus, great business success and personal wealth are the results of great Christian faith and practice. Many [other Christians] are uneasy with such beliefs.”

And van Wensven Siker (1989) describes a variety of Christian worldviews, ranging from “Christ against business” to “The Christ of Business.”

Naughton and Bausch (1996: 122) call for a non-conventional approach to management that goes beyond the conventional and does not “reduce the meaning of management to a game or series of profit-maximizing techniques.” Nelson (1989: 209) describes how, when some religious organizations follow a counter-cultural approach, they become popular precisely because they challenge status quo (iron-cage-like) power structures and norms: “Moreover, the ‘anti-establishment’ posture of many religious movements sometimes leads them to select administrative forms at variance with the institutional patterns of the general society.” Plowman et al (2007) provide an inspiring case of how “a simple act of generosity”—which challenged the status quo and garnered “criticism from surrounding businesses”—triggered the transformation of a fairly white and economically-advantaged congregation into a congregation that welcomed everyone from all walks of life, including socially-marginalized people who lived around its downtown location.

***Confucianism*.** Nineteen of the 21 Confucian articles in our review of the literature were published in the two ethics journals on our list (4 in *Business Ethics Quarterly,*15 in *Journal of Business Ethics*). The majority of these articles described differences between Western and Confucian views, including different views on intellectual property rights (Lehman, 2006), trust (Koehn, 1999, 2001), the nature of what it means to be human (Hahn, 1972), workplace rights (Strudler, 2008) and other ethical issues (Dollinger, 1988; Chung, Eichenseher and Taniguchi, 2008), and show how cultural views may overshadow national views (e.g., Tan and Chow, 2009).

Articles that note counter-cultural differences between Confucianism and conventional management often mention to Confucianism’s teachings against profit-maximization and self-interest seeking (e.g., Boardman and Kato, 2003: 323; Cheung and King, 2004: 258). This is evident in the following:

“The collectivist flavor of Confucianism clearly distinguishes it from individualist and liberalist doctrines held in the West” (Cheung and Chan, 2005:51).

“There are many references to profit in early Confucian thought, where the central theme is the moral person seeking rightness, doing what is correct, rather than seeking profit. Fundamentally, the moral person lives by the rites, applies the golden rule and virtues and is cautious in situations of personal gain” (Romar, 2004a: 671).

“The Master said, ‘If one is guided by profit in one's actions, one will incur much ill will.’ (Lau 1979: 73)” (taken from the *Analects*, cited in Romar, 2004a: 675)

“However grave a risk a storm at sea might pose, it is to be feared less than the risk that human greed poses.” (Boardman and Kato, 2003: 325).

***Hinduism*.** Barnett (1985) begins his article with a promise to escape materialism and workaholism, and with a provocative counter-cultural quote: “If American businessmen are right in the way most of them now live, then all wise men of the ages, all prophets and saints were fools” (Finkelstein, 1958: 116, cited in Barnett, 1985: 57). However, as noted in the earlier review of articles in the scripture-enhancement quadrant, rather than describe how a Hinduism model of enlightenment can help to escape this foolishness, Barnett instead seems to argue that a Hindu perspective can provide spiritual meaning to it. Along the same lines, recall from the scripture-enhancement quadrant that Niles (1999) makes a similar argument that, although Hinduism may at first appear to be counter-cultural, this is not necessarily the case.

***Islam*.** Most of the articles on Islam note that it is not known for being receptive to capitalism and modern management theory:

“Islam has been negatively related to successful entrepreneurship. … According to Weber, Islamic societies were not able to produce ‘the spirit of capitalism’ because of the warrior ethic, otherworldly Sufism, oriental despotism and a lack of individualism” (Essers and Benschop, 2009: 408).

“In recent times, the leaders of many Moslem nations, realizing that they cannot compete with the West or the industrialized East, have reverted to Islamic fundamentalism. … Ideologically, Islam subscribes neither to capitalism nor to communism” (Wright, 1981: 40).

“Rent seeking business practices certainly do not add value to the society. In fact, such practices which are common in developing countries, are counterproductive to both economic and social justice” (Abeng, 1997: 54).

As a case in point, Wright (1981) describes how Human Resource management practices based on Islamic principles contrast with conventional management theory.

“For Islamic managers, however, on-the-job performance is clearly of subsidiary importance; their evaluation of employees concentrates on personalities and individual circumstances. The questions going through a Moslem manager's mind might include these:

- Is the employee a nice person and do I like him?

- Can I expect him to be loyal to me?

- Does he need the job financially? If so, he would be a loyal worker. Also, it would please God to provide a job to the needy” (Wright, 1981: 36).

Finally, Campbell (2008: 427) notes that traits associated with “servant leaders,” an approach to leadership originally associated “disillusionment with Western hierarchical and material social structures … are, and always have been, characteristic of Muslim leaders” (see also Abeng, 1997: 51).

**Summary**. As might be predicted based on Weber (1958), whereas almost two-thirds of the articles in the previous “enhancement” quadrant where from a Christian perspective, in this “liberating” quadrant that number drop to about one-third. Indeed, in this quadrant almost half of the articles are from a Confucian perspective. It is also striking that over one-third of the articles explicitly draw attention to the tension between the enhancement versus liberating views, in particular, that scriptures from their tradition have been used to support either. This suggests that the scriptures may be ambivalent on the topic, and/or that religious followers are unclear as to how to interpret scriptures, and/or that followers are clever enough to interpret scriptures according to their own assumptions and beliefs (indeed, recall that several articles suggest that it is a strength of religion to change in order to keep up with the times). Finally, when it comes to describing what non-conventional or radical management theory and practice might look like, most of the articles are short on specifics or have a fairly narrow focus.

**Spirituality-Liberation quadrant**

This quadrant includes research that shows that people who engage in spiritual practices become increasingly liberated from the materialistic-individualistic hallmarks of conventional management theory and practice. In particular, the focus in on empirical research that has measures of spiritual practices—like prayer, meditation and mindfulness—and some measures of how these practices are associated with factors like efficiency-mindedness, financial success or materialism, and individualism or self-actualization.

***Buddhism*.** Liberating and radical implications of Buddhist spiritual practices are evident in Judith White’s (1998) interview with Burma’s Nobel Peace Prize winner and practicing Buddhist, Aung San Suu Kyi. In the interview Suu Kyi talks about the importance of spirituality:

“I think no human being can do without some kind of spiritual cultivation, because there is a spiritual dimension to life. I don't think you can deny that. Why are there religions in the world? Because there is this human need to cultivate the spiritual dimension, to go beyond the mere gratification of the body and material needs” (quoted in White, 1998: 292).

She emphasizes the importance of “real compassion,” which “means that you just can't sit by and see other people suffer or sit by and not do anything about acts of injustice, because injustice makes people suffer” (quoted in White, 1998: 291). For Suu Kyi that means standing up for justice, even in the face of grave personal danger. It also means finding creative ways to overcome possible shortcomings of conventional business norms: “A lot of businesses are only concerned with making money. We've got to face that” (quoted in White, 1998: 293). The interview concludes by describing how consumers who have compassion can use boycotts (or buy-cotts) to pressure profit-driven businesses into supporting issues of justice.

The counter-cultural nature of Buddhist spiritual practices is also evident in Kernochan, McCormick and White (2007), who provide compelling first-hand accounts of the effect that practicing three key Buddhist spiritual disciplines—compassion, mindfulness, and the no-self—has had on themselves as management instructors. (They also describe how these Buddhist teachings, which may at first seem foreign to conventional ways of teaching management, are in fact consistent with the teachings from a variety of other world religions.) Putting these spiritual disciplines into practice can challenge conventional management, for example, by prompting questions such as: “which is more important—self-interest or the greater good, me or we, short-term gain or concern for future generations” (p 65).

“As Westerners, we perceive ourselves as self-conscious individuals, focusing primarily on our own selves and ‘needs.’ Much of economics, for example, views human behavior as centered on maximizing individual self-interest and thus less sensitive to others and their environment. … In the Buddhist concept of no-self, the distinctions or boundaries between the individual self and the external environment are dissolved and thus have no meaning” (p 68).

While such counter-cultural views serve to change the experience in the classroom for the instructors, and presumably for the students, their effect on course content is left unspecified and left as a possible topic for future research. (Other articles on bringing spirituality in the classroom that fail to explicitly spell out well-developed implications for the *content* of management theory include Pielstick [2005], Marcic, [2000], and Barnett, Krell and Sendry [2000]).

***Christianity*.** A spirituality-liberation article that explicitly examines conventional versus radical management examines data from a sample of 170 self-identified Christian managers (Dyck and Weber, 2006). The study tests the Weberian idea that managers who place relatively high emphasis on both materialism and individualism (37 managers of the 170, who are called Conventional managers) manage differently than managers who place relatively low emphasis on both these two hallmarks of Weber’s iron cage (44 Radical managers). As expected, compared to Radical managers, Conventional managers place greater emphasis on: specialization, centralization, formalization, and specialization. Also as expected, Radical managers tend to place more emphasis on sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation (i.e., the four parallel Radical counterparts to specialization, centralization, formalization, and specialization, as described in Dyck and Schroeder, 2005). Building further on Max Weber’s analysis, the study also examines whether spiritual practices are different for Conventional versus Radical managers. Compared to Conventional managers, Radical managers have higher “personal spiritual virtues,” a five-item measure where two items focus on prayer (“I seek God’s will through prayer,” “I am making a deliberate effort to grow into a deeper relationship with God”) and three focus on listening to voice of God at work (“At work, I consider God to be my ultimate Boss,” “I believe that God is at work in my life today,” and “My faith is the most important influence in my life”).

Another study that points to a negative relationship between spiritual practices and materialism-individualism comes from Agle and Van Buren (1999), which is based on a sample of 180 self-identified Christians (a subset of 250 MBA students at a major public non-sectarian Midwestern business school). Their study finds that “religious reflection” (a 7-item scale that asks how often respondents have thought about their relationship with God, linking their faith to their work, and their responsibility to the poor) is positively correlated with “egalitarianism” (e.g., “Christians should strive for a society in which the income gap between rich and poor is narrower than it is now”) and with “faith requires works” (e.g., “It is wrong for every person to be out for him or herself”). “Religious reflection” was also positively related to respondents’ attitudes toward corporate social responsibility.

In another article that fits in this quadrant, Wong (2008) starts by noting the tension between conventional and radical views: “The primacy of profits in the business world cannot be denied. But enshrined in the Bible are such reminders and warnings as ‘You cannot serve both God and Money’” (Wong, 2008: 170). The article then goes on to describe a study of Malaysian evangelical Christians in business. Consistent with the spirituality-liberation quadrant, the findings show that managers with higher scores in a two-item “religiousness scale” (Sunday service attendance and personal devotion) have lower scores as “Successful Money Achievers.” (Findings also showed that those who are more interested in money tended to be more accepting of unethical scenarios.) Despite being aware of biblical teachings about the tension between God and money, Wong seems to find the lack of empirical support for the conventional paradigm to be problematic, and the article concludes noting that: “Christianity is keen to show that Christians can be successful within the faith. *The desire to succeed must not be dampened*. … The difficulty is how to make money righteously, in a Christian way” (Wong, 2008: 189; emphasis added here).

The earliest spirituality-liberation study reviewed here is by John Senger (1970), published in *Academy of Management Journal.* Senger (1970) begins by noting that most of the literature assumes that Christian values are compatible with conventional management:

“most articles [that look at religion and management] are primarily concerned with ethics and values, with religion recognized as a fundamental source of these ethics and values. The motivation influence of religion upon the business community was recognized by Weber when he developed this theory of economic motivation in capitalistic countries based upon what he termed the Judeo-Christian ethic in which ‘getting ahead’ in business was construed as a path to salvation” (Senger, 1970: 179-180).

Though not all of the 244 American managers in Senger’s sample are Christian, Christianity is their main religious background. The study measures the emphasis each manager places on “religion” (a factor based on items measuring “worship, church and religion”) and compares this with a variety of other measures. The results seem directly opposite to what we would expect given Weber’s argument relating Christianity to the materialist-individualist hallmarks of mainstream management. Senger (1970) finds that managers who place relatively high emphasis on “religion” also place relatively low emphasis on items related to: 1) materialism (“To make the largest possible, long-run profit;” “To make a lot of money”) and 2) individualism (“To do the kind of work that will give me satisfaction;” also, consistent with a non-self-interested approach, highly religious managers tended to place relatively high emphasis on “To be a constructive force in the community”). Perhaps the most surprising result is that, despite their counter-cultural lack of emphasis on maximizing profits, these more religious managers were also more likely to be highly rated by their superiors.

A study by Sherman and Smith (1984) uses a measure called “*intrinsic religiosity*” that includes items like: “It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and prayer;” “Quite often I have been keenly aware of the presence of God or of the Divine Being;” “The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services;” “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life;” “I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life” (taken from Feagin, 1964).[[2]](#footnote-2) In Sherman and Smith’s (1984) study the *intrinsic religiosity* scores of more than 500 respondents from a sample of 42 conservative Protestant congregations are negatively correlated with levels of organizational standardization, centralization, formalization, hierarchy and size (akin to Dyck and Weber, 2006). *Intrinsic religiosity* was also positively related to integration (the amount of communication among organizational members). Taken together, these findings suggest that higher levels of spiritual practices correspond to less mechanistic organizations. Or is it the other way around, namely that organizational structure affects intrinsic religiosity? Sherman and Smith (1984) found that 41 percent of the variance in intrinsic religiosity was explained by structural variables (standardization, centralization, hierarchy and organizational size).

As Sherman and Smith (1984) allude to, it is one thing to find significant relationship between spiritual practices and management, but it is another to determine which affects which. Although longitudinal research on this topic is rare, there are several studies that provide some indication that spiritually may lead to the development and adoption of liberating management theory and practice. One of these comes from Lecourt and Pauchant (2011), based on interviews with 20 senior managers and top executives who regularly practice Ignatian spiritual disciplines. Their findings suggest that spiritual practices change managers over time, making them less materialistic and less individualistic as they become less profit-maximizing and more interested in developing human community:

“All the Ignatian executives that we have interviewed emphasized that for them the mission of their organization is neither on profit maximization nor on efficiency. While they take notions of profits and efficiency very seriously both are at the service of human development. *Their spiritual life has transformed things for them*” (Lecourt and Pauchant, 2011: 22; emphasis added here).

In the words of two of their Ignatian interviewees:

*“My spiritual life has transformed things. My relationship to others is different as well as the relationship to my organization’s mission. Its official objective—profit and performance—is important, but it needs to be put into perspective and modified. … True performance is really the development of people, the growth of each person” (pp. 22-23).*

*“For example, recently, we had the opportunity to expand our market shares in two different counties, with the potential of very healthy profits. I refused to sign the contract because I believe we were not ready to expand internationally due to questions of human development … The decision was different for my colleagues since they were only considering the financial aspect of the opportunity” (p. 23).*

Another noteworthy study with longitudinal implications comes from Gold (2010), who describes changes over time among the 750 organizations involved in the “Economy of Communion” (EOC) network associated with the Focolare (the largest lay movement in the Catholic church). When the vision for EOC was presented in 1991, it changed the way businesspeople within the Focolare movement saw about their business: it allowed them to see their economic enterprise as wholly spiritual, and their spiritual lives as manifest in economic organizations.

“It marked a dramatic transformation in the way that they viewed the relationship between economic life, (including work, money and the role of business) and their spiritual life. They repeatedly referred to this date as a fundamental turning point in their life. Before 1991, they regarded their economic activities primarily as a means to an end—that of making a living—controlled by external market forces over which they had little influence. … When the EOC started, they recognized the immense importance that their business activities could have by actively participating in the transformation of market structures through sharing profits and changing business practices. The transformation of existing businesses and the creation of new enterprises became their central focus, not only economically, but also spiritually. It was to become the main motivating force behind their business” (Gold, 2010: 121).

Gold’s (2010) research shows how, over time, this new spiritual orientation in the workplace has changed the way EOC businesses operate. Participating in EOC over time has resulted in managers implementing liberating practices, such as adopting recruitment policies that target people living at the margins of society, empowering people to make decisions throughout the business, and relating to others as “people” rather than as “task-completers.” It has also resulted in managers being more likely pay employees a living wage, to reduce income inequality, and to take “externalities” into account in their decisions. Members of EOC firms are less likely to see customers merely as a source of revenue to maximize profits – rather they are valued for their personal relationships. Similarly, members of EOC treat even their competitors in radical ways, as evident in the following experience told by the manager of an EOC medical supply business in Brazil:

“Many business have tried to copy our way of working. Our competitors are shocked by the fact that we are happy to show them how we work—and they try to do the same. They don’t manage to copy our way of working, however, because it is not a formula that says ‘do this’ ‘do that’ … it is a way of being, a way of acting.

Last year there was a competitor who tried to attack us on every corner … creating a very difficult situation for our business. At a certain point, the law in Brazil changed and it was a very important change. In order to help this other business, we faxed the news to them. The business owner was so struck by our gesture that he not only wanted to re-establish his friendship with us, but he offered to help us in areas that we find difficult. It was through him that we had the idea of getting in a consultancy – the best decision that we ever made. That consultant was so impressed by how we run our business that he goes out of his way to help us in whatever way he can. This all started through responding to the aggression of our competitors with a different attitude” (Gold, 2010: 145).

***Confucianism*.**  Among the articles that focus on Confucianism, Cheung and King (2004) is the most explicit in providing a sustained description of practicing Confucian principles in the workplace. Their study suggests that managers who practice Confucian principles will challenge the conventional approach to management. They not only review the ancient Confucian texts regarding profits and self-interest behavior, but they also provide historical exemplars of implementing these teachings and, perhaps most importantly, describe modern-day managers whose counter-cultural activities are motivated by and illustrate Confucian principles. They conclude that:

“An implication of this study is that, however powerful instrumental rationality may be in the business world, there is always room for resistance. … The experience of our respondents shows that to resist the powerful forces of instrumental rationality in a world where the pace of globalization gathers momentum is akin to fighting an uphill battle. Should we therefore ‘go with the flow’, surrender autonomy and submit ourselves to the whims of these forces? Or should we adhere to our beliefs whatever the obstacles we encounter? This is a key challenge facing every individual in modern society” (Cheung and King, 2004: 258-259).

***Islam*.**  Our sample contained only one study of looking at the spirituality of Muslim managers (Ayranci and Semercioz, 2011), based on a sample of top Turkish managers (96 percent of the people in the country of Turkey are Muslim). The results show that managers’ “religiosity” scores (e.g., “I engage in religious or spiritual activities (prayer, meditation, yoga, etc.),” “I follow God,” “I feel close to God”) is related to “immateriality” (e.g., “My goals and purpose extend beyond the material world,” “My actions are aligned with my soul—my essential, true nature”). Again, this challenges conventional management.

**Summary**. Much of the ambiguity and tension that characterizes the articles that describe what religious *scriptures* say about management is not evident in the empirical research that examines the relationship between *spiritual practices* and management. Taken together, the empirical results presented here are clear and consistent: spiritual practices result in decreased emphasis on financial and individual well-being, and increased emphasis on holistic wellbeing of the collective (especially the marginalized). This is true across the different world religions where research on this topic has been published. In particular, perhaps somewhat surprisingly in light of Weber (1958), about two-thirds of the articles in this quadrant were from a Christian perspective, and each suggested that spiritual practices were associated with *weakened* alignment with mainstream management theory and practice.

**Spirituality-Enhancement quadrant**

This quadrant is for research that shows that people who engage in spiritual practices become increasingly aligned with conventional management theory and practice. Again, we examined research that measured spiritual practices and had some measure of the two hallmarks of mainstream theory, namely an emphasis on material well-being (e.g., profits) and individual well-being (e.g., self-interests).

**Summary**. There is no evidence in the literature reviewed here to suggest that managers who practice spiritual disciplines—like prayer, meditation and mindfulness—become more efficiency-minded, more profitable, more individualistic, or even more self-actualizing. No studies were found that demonstrated that people who are spiritually active become more aligned with conventional management theory and practice. Given the observation that about half of the scripture-based articles were in the “enhancement” quadrant and the other half in the “liberation” quadrant, one might have expected a similar distribution for articles based on spiritual practices. This simply was not the case.

**Conclusions and future directions**

This chapter has reviewed studies found in secular management journals that describe how religion can inform organization and management theory and practice. The findings, as a whole, are striking. First, the review shows that religious *scriptures* tend to be interpreted in two different ways with regard to their implications for management. About half of the studies interpret religious scriptures to provide support for enhancing mainstream management, and the other half interpret scriptures to call for developing a liberating radical approach to management. These divergent implications of scriptures for management may suggest that the scriptures are ambiguous or unclear, that people have not studied them carefully enough, or that people are clever enough to interpret them to say whatever they want to hear (perhaps this is not particularly surprising). Second, in light of these split findings about the what is said in scriptures, it seems especially noteworthy that empirical studies that examine *spiritual practices* consistently point to liberation from conventional management. Not one study was found which said that managers who practiced spiritual disciplines—like prayer, meditation, mindfulness—became more inclined toward conventional management theory and practice. A third finding of note is that these similar themes and findings are evident across all of the leading world religions.

Beyond these general themes and findings, the chapter is also important at a more broad level because of the strong support it lends to the theological turn in organization studies. The remainder of the chapter will provide some reflections on the implications of the theological turn for the management literature in terms of spiritual practices, the development of radical organization and management theory and practice, and meta-ethics.

**The theological turn and spiritual practices**

Of the two ways identified in the literature for religion to inform management—sacred scriptures versus spiritual practice—studies focusing on scriptures are about five times more frequent than studies focused on spiritual practices. This suggests that future research that focuses on religious spiritual practices—like prayer, meditation and mindfulness—is particularly welcome (Poloma, and Pendleton, 1989). Even Albert Einstein, himself agnostic, is reputed to have told a doctoral student searching for a dissertation topic to: “Find out about prayer, someone needs to find out about prayer” (cited in Nunes, 2009). Insofar as spiritual practices provide practitioners direct access to a deity or transcendent other, then this may be a particularly appropriate way of studying God on management.

That said, there has been much written recently on the topic of spirituality in the workplace. However, it has been estimated that less than twenty percent of this literature actually makes reference to a deity, and much of it seeks to discover how spirituality can be used to improve profits (e.g., the so-called prosperity gospel, Roels, 1997; see also Lambert, 2009; Lynn, Naughton and VanderVeen, 2009; Marcic, 2000). This is very different from the empirical research reviewed here, which found that an emphasis on religious spiritual practices is consistently associated with a de-emphasis on maximizing profits and an emphasis on nurturing holistic community.

The theological turn would call for research on spiritual practices that takes seriously the idea of a loving God, of some altruistic “transcendent other,” of a deity that can inspire humankind to act beyond their individual self-interests. To be clear, the goal is not to study how spiritual practices can (directly) change other people or existing structures and systems. Rather, research suggests that spiritual practices like prayer have the greatest effect on the person doing the actual praying, and not so much directly on the situations or people being prayed for (which has yielded “very meager results”): “prayer was found to have pervasive effects on the emotional experience, social behavior, and cognitive appraisals of praying individuals” (Bremner, Kooler and Bushman, 2011: 836). In short, it is the people who are practicing the spiritual disciplines who change, and who then act as agents of change in the socially-constructed worlds they inhabit. In particular, the literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that research on religious spiritual practices would contribute to the development of non-conventional organization and management theory and practice, of approaches to management that liberate humankind from the materialistic-individualistic iron cage that characterizes the mainstream management. This sets the stage for the second implication.

**The theological turn and the development of radical management theory**

The theological turn both enables and calls for the development of radical organization and management theory and practice. For proponents of the theological turn, to study “God on management” is to subvert conventional management scholarship, which is steeped in an understanding that management is primarily about maximizing financial returns for shareholders.

Of course, glimpses of alternative management theories are already evident in many new literatures, from sustainable development to corporate social responsibility to social entrepreneurship to stakeholder theory. But, as Weber speculated, without being grounded in an alternative substantive rationality, all-too-often these glimpses of radical approaches have become co-opted into the conventional paradigm. So, for example, stakeholder theory has now become yet another tool to enhance shareholder profits rather than to provide an alternative theory to challenge the shareholder approach, and the majority of research in corporate social responsibility now seeks to show how it can increase profits (e.g., Margolis and Walsh, 2003).

The theological turn enables and calls for more fully developing approaches to management that represent liberation from a mainstream approach. Such an approach is called for and informed by among practitioners who currently engage in spiritual disciplines, and can be supplemented by religious scriptures. With regard to interpretations of religious scriptures, more effort should be invested in understanding the meaning of management at the time and context in which the scriptures were originally written, in order to understand them *in situ* and draw out implications for further theory and development (for a recent attempt at doing this for the first-century biblical Gospel of Luke, see Dyck, 2013; see also Dyck, Starke and Weimer, 2012). Perhaps if we took the analysis of religious scriptures in their historical context with the same scholarly rigour we give to other research question, we would find that they speak with a more consistent voice than is evident in the present literature.

While it is appropriate to develop radical management theory based on *particular* faith traditions, scholars are also encouraged to be sensitive to similarities *across* traditions (and across secular ethical philosophies). Focusing on common or “universal” ethics promises to nurture cooperation and mutuality, and to limit unhealthy rivalries between differing religious understandings of the divine (de George, 1986: 430).

Of course, this is not to exclude contributions to radical management theory that can come from non-religious business ethicists. Even so, Leahy (1986) identifies at least three additional contributions that a theological turn offers compared to a research grounded in non-religious ethics: 1) because religious ethics are typically embedded in religious practices and organizations, they inherently have a practical dimension that ethics based in philosophy often lack; 2) religious ethics draw upon the practice of moral discernment to complement the rationality common to philosophical analysis; and 3) religious ethics recognize life as ironic, and thus acknowledge tensions in human behavior rather than promote absolute pronouncements.

**The theological turn and meta-ethics**

And third, the theological turn points to the merit in thinking more deeply about meta-ethics and the value-laden assumptions that underpin all organization and management theory and practice. As Weber reminds us, the mainstream materialistic-individualistic iron cage is not value-neutral. Indeed, several centuries ago what today would be called conventional management was itself counter-cultural, and shook the foundations of what it meant to be human (and what it meant to be religious). Consistent with this view, a recent study describes how the meaning of “salvation” has changed throughout the past two millennia, and how these changes were associated with and manifest in differing organizational structures and systems (Dyck and Wiebe, 2012). Once we remember that the status quo emphasis on maximizing profits is not value-neutral, we are able to consider alternative moral-points-of-view (Weber’s “substantive rationalities”) upon which to develop counter-cultural organization and management theory and practice (e.g., a radical Weberian “formal rationality”).

A fundamental difference between enhancement versus liberating articles is in their starting point vis a vis ethical behavior. Many enhancement articles seek to improve ethics within a conventional management paradigm, which they seem to accept as either value-neutral or as basically ethical. Thus, they present ways to make it is as ethical as possible to attain competitiveness, maximize profits, and to serve the interests of shareholders. While this is laudable, it does not raise the question of whether it is ethical in the first place to seek competitive advantage (a variation of monopoly?), to maximize profits (greed?), or to priorize the financial needs of shareholders (perpetuates gap between the rich and poor?).

These larger meta-ethical questions are implicitly raised in liberating articles, and need to be addressed if we are to escape the iron cage (Weber, 1958; Solomon and Hanson, 1983). These sorts of meta-ethical issues are precisely what proponents of the theological turn welcome and embrace. For them, as for Weber, researching “God on management” is of particular value because it promises to liberate people from the grip of management theory and practice that is grounded in a materialistic-individualistic moral-point-of-view.

In sum, this chapter points to the merit of the theological turn and studying God on management. The majority of the world belongs to one of its five leading religions, and religious scriptures and spiritual practices have and can inform management theory and practice. In particular, such research promises develop alternative approaches to management that liberate people from the limitations associated with conventional organization and management theory and practice.

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**Table 1a: List of journals and keywords for second phase of literature review**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Journal Title** |
| 1 | Academy of Management Journal |
| 2 | Academy of Management Review |
| 3 | Academy of Management Executive (perspectives) |
| 4 | Academy of Management Learning and Education |
| 5 | Accounting, Organizations and Society |
| 6 | Administrative Science Quarterly |
| 7 | Business Ethics Quarterly |
| 8 | California Management Review |
| 9 | Christian Scholars Review |
| 10 | Harvard Business Review |
| 11 | Human Relations |
| 12 | Human Resource Management |
| 13 | Journal of Applied Psychology |
| 14 | Journal of Biblical Integration In Business |
| 15 | Journal of Business Ethics |
| 16 | Journal of Business Venturing |
| 17 | Journal of Management |
| 18 | Journal of Management Education |
| 19 | Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion |
| 20 | Journal of Management Studies |
| 21 | Journal of Management Inquiry |
| 22 | Journal of Organizational Behaviour |
| 23 | Journal of Religious Leadership |
| 24 | Journal of Small Business Management |
| 25 | The Leadership Quarterly |
| 26 | Long Range Planning |
| 27 | Management Science |
| 28 | Organization Science |
| 29 | Organization Studies |
| 30 | Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes |
| 31 | Sloan Management Review |
| 32 | Strategic Management Journal |

**Table 1b: Keywords/search terms used in second phase of literature review**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Religion** | **Exemplar** | **Sacred Texts/**Scripture etc |
| Buddhism | Buddha ,Siddhartha, Gautama, Siddhattha, Gotama | Dharma, Dhamma, Buddhism, Buddhist |
| Christianity | Jesus, Christ | Christian, Bible, Gospel, Kingdom of God |
| Confucianism | Confucius | Analects |
| Hinduism | Krishna, Brahma, Shiva | Bhagavad, Gita, Mahabharata, Gitopanishad, Yogopanishad, Veda, Vedas, Upanishads, Hindu |
| Islam/Muslim | Mohammed, Muhammad, Muhammed | Koran, Qur'an, Quran, Alcoran, Sunnah |

**Figure 1: God on management: Four quadrants to review the literature**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| scriptural enhancement | scriptural liberation |
| spiritual enhancement | spiritual liberation |

via scriptures

*How* God speaks

to management

via spiritual

practices

enhancement of liberation from

mainstream mainstream

*What* God says about management

1. This is the penultimate version of the published paper:

   Dyck, B. (2014). God on Management: The world’s largest religions, the ‘theological turn’, and organizational and management theory and practice. In P. Tracey, N. Phillips & M. Lounsbury (Eds.) *Research in the Sociology of Organizations: Religion and Organization Theory*, vol. 41: 23-62.

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2. “Intrinsic religiosity”—based on Allport (1959, 1963), refined by Feagin (1964), see also Allport and Ross (1967)—is one of the most frequently used constructs in the larger literature on this topic (Mirels and Garrett, 1971; Tang and Tang, 2010). Other studies using the intrinsic religiosity measure among samples which are not explicitly managers consistently show that it is negatively related to financially self-interested attitudes and behavior (see Chau, Johnson, Bowers, Darvell and Danko, 1990; Johnson et al, 1989; Loveland, Sikkink, Myers and Radcliff, 2005; Swinyard, Kau and Phua, 2001; Tang and Tang, 2010; Vitell, Paolillo and Singh, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)