

RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF SET MANAGEMENT

Ever since Max Weber wrote his best-known book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, there has been considerable agreement among scholars that modern mainstream management is grounded in a religious moral-point-of-view that has long since been secularized. A recent review of the literature on what the world's five leading religions said about management found that there is on-going debate among scholars regarding whether religious sacred writings favor a mainstream approach to management or a SET approach. However, there is considerable agreement in the empirical research from managers who follow one of the world's five leading religions: the more managers put spiritual teachings into practice, the more they align with SET management. Such research is consistent with the growing interest in understanding spirituality and management, and in the so-called "theological turn."

"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. ... 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. ... The theological turn enables and calls for more fully developing approaches to management that represent liberation from a mainstream approach. ...

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 countercultural, 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. 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 countercultural organization and management theory and practice (e.g., a radical Weberian "formal rationality")."

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