How Does Religion Matter and Why?
Religion and the Organizational Sciences

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Religion is becoming increasingly salient in and around, but not confined to, the American workplace. The rise of openly faith-based organizations and discourse surrounding the role and importance of spirituality are just a couple of the indicators that religion, in its various guises, is playing a role in organizational life. With few exceptions, however, scholarly research has sidestepped the issue of religion, and, perhaps unwittingly, discourse surrounding spirituality seems to imply that religion is a benign and positive force. Rather than implicitly or explicitly assuming that religion is a benign, positive force in organizations, in this paper, we suggest that organizational scholars need to rigorously address the potential consequences of religion at work in a dispassionate manner that acknowledges both the benefits/adaptive outcomes and the challenges/maladaptive outcomes. Specifically, adopting primarily a psychological approach, we theorize about two fundamental tensions produced by contemplations about religion and the concept of God at work and the conditions under which benefits versus challenges may prevail. These exemplary tensions, virtuousness versus “more-virtuous-than-thou” and prosociality and ethicality versus egocentrism, highlight the fact that religion has the potential to result in both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes for organizations and their members. Importantly, for each tension, we theorize about the initial conditions under which beneficial/adaptive or challenging/maladaptive outcomes will prevail. We also explore the critical role that the wider context plays in understanding these tensions and how religion affects organizational life.

Key words: religion; organizational behavior; psychological processes

Introduction
Contemplations about religion and the concept of God appear to be on the rise, at least in, but not confined to, the American workplace (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009). Sometimes this is notable because businesses label and promote themselves as faith based. For example, Christian Owned & Operated is a website listing Christian businesses in Houston and surrounding areas (http://www.christianownedandoperated.com). To be listed in the directory, a firm must agree to the following statement, found on the directory’s website:

We are a Christian owned and operated business who believes Jesus Christ came into the world as God’s one and only son, to forgive us of our sins and give everlasting life to those who accept him as their Lord and Savior. We operate our business under the same guiding principles taught by Jesus Christ.

Similar directories, including those of other faiths, also are widespread outside the United States (e.g., Fellowship of Companies for Christ International (http://www.fcci.org) in over 20 countries, Buddhist Business Network (http://www.buddhistbusiness.com) in Malaysia). As we argue later, we expect that managers of most faith-based businesses would describe their workplaces as spiritual. For now, all we want to recognize is that spirituality and religion in the workplace is a
“hot topic” as reflected by the number of trade books recently published addressing the subject. Representative titles include *Spirituality, Inc.: Religion in the American Workplace* (Lambert 2009), *God Is My CEO: Following God’s Principles in a Bottom-line World* (Julian 2002), and *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (Mitroff and Denton 1999).

Although a few organizational scholars have addressed the role of God and religion in the workplace, the dominant orientation of these authors has been to emphasize the positive organizational outcomes of religion, or more accurately, spirituality (e.g., Ashmos and Duchon 2000, Delbecq 1999). Alternatively, we strive to be more balanced with the intent of better framing the study of religion at work. Thus, our approach is similar to the one taken by Ashforth and Vaidyanath (2002) in their treatment of organizations as secular religions in that in addition to acknowledging potential benefits, they also discuss potential costs. However, although our approach complements theirs, it is distinct in that we explicitly focus on religion, as opposed to secular systems that may take on “religious” aspects. Furthermore, our paper is broader than the Lip-Wiersma et al. (2009) discussion about the “dark side of the workplace spirituality movement” in that we do not focus on how organizations and their management misuse spirituality to control or seduce their stakeholders. Rather, we reflect more generally on the role that thoughts about God and religion play in the workplace. For instance, we consider how these thoughts affect organizational members’ virtuousness and their (un)ethical behaviors.

Tensions between positive and negative consequences of religion exist yet have gone largely unrecognized in the organizational literature. Most commonly, the positive is accentuated (e.g., Delbecq 1999). By exploring the tensions between the benefits and challenges engendered by contemplations about God in organizational life and by advancing a preliminary framework by which religion in organizations can be examined, we hope to push the study of religion at work into the mainstream. As we will argue below, although there are some notable exceptions (e.g., Weaver and Agle 2002), the implications of religion for organizational life have not been adequately addressed in the organizational sciences.

The remainder of our paper unfolds as follows. First, we address the likely import of considering religion at work and clarify what we mean by “religion at work.” Next, in an attempt to provide a balanced treatment, our paper highlights two exemplary cases of tensions between related benefits/adaptive outcomes and challenges/maladaptive outcomes of having religion infused into organizational life. The adaptive (and maladaptive) outcomes—namely, virtuousness (versus “more-virtuous-than-thou”) and prosociality/ethicality (versus egocentrism)—were selected because of their potential import to the effective functioning of organizations (see, for example, Cameron 2003 and Podsakoff et al. 1997, respectively). Our aim here is to focus research attention not just on the good or the bad but on both simultaneously, as well as to encourage others to explore under what conditions one might prevail over the other. This paper closes with a framework for the study of religion at work that recognizes the contexts within which such conflicting forces play themselves out. In the end, we hope our efforts will entice more scholars to study the effects of religion in organizations.

**The Potential Import of God at Work**

According to a Gallup poll (Gallup 2009), 56% of Americans report that religion is very important in their lives, 63% say they are a member of a church or synagogue, and 55% claim they attend a church or synagogue once a month or more (but see Chaves et al. 1998). There are more than 159 million adult Christians, 2.8 million adult Jews, and 1.1 million adult Muslims in the United States according to the American Religious Identification Survey (Kosmin et al. 2001). Moving beyond the United States, the Gallup Organization surveyed representative samples in 143 countries in 2006 to 2008 and found that the median proportion of respondents who claimed that religion is important in their daily lives was an overwhelming 82% (Crabtree and Pelham 2009). It probably is safe to assume that many of these people, especially the 56% in the United States and the 82% (median) across 143 countries reporting religion as important in their lives, do not check their thoughts about God at the workplace door.

We clearly are not the first social scientists to recognize the importance of religion in their realms of inquiry. William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was first published in 1902. He defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 2007, p. 24). James argued that the “healthyminded” religious person (as contrasted with a person believing in “hell-fire theology”) will have a deep sense of “the goodness of life” and a soul of “sky-blue tint” (p. 49). Thus, on balance, James found religious experience to be useful, even for biological functioning. But this usefulness did not imply to him the truth value of religion per se. An example of equally important early work in sociology is Weber’s (1922) *The Sociology of Religion*. This tour de force opens by tackling the question of why humankind so widely embraces the belief in supernatural powers, and it then moves on to discuss such ideas as God and prophets, as well as to examine the formation of religious communities and different roads to salvation (see Tracey’s 2012 review of the key literature in the sociology of religion). Below, we offer
snapshots of how the study of religion is forming today in psychology and sociology, as well as in management. Describing the upsurge in the last 25 years in psychology, Emmons and Paloutzian (2003, p. 379) stated, “The psychology of religion re-emerged as a full-force, leading-edge research area that contributes new knowledge, data, and professional activity to the rest of psychology. This is apparent upon examination of the recent trends in the publication of textbooks and journal articles. . . . These trends became visible after the establishment of APA [American Psychological Association] Division 36, Psychology of Religion. . . .”

In sociology, Sherkat and Ellison (1999, p. 363) noted, “The sociology of religion is experiencing a period of substantial organizational and intellectual progress. Social scientific organizations devoted to the study of religion have experienced unprecedented growth in meetings attendance and membership, and a sociology of religion section was recently added in the American Sociological Association.”

The Academy of Management has a Management, Spirituality, and Religion Interest Group with approximately 700 members, and the Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion published its first issue in 2004. Something clearly is happening academically that we believe reflects prior neglect and powerful forces in society. Iannaccone’s (1998) writing in the economics literature identified several forces in the United States that have led to academic interest in religion. Two of these are that (1) church membership rates have risen throughout most of the past two centuries, and (2) inconsistent with the common notion that religion is a source of hope primarily for the less privileged, numerous analyses of survey data demonstrate that rates of religious belief and activity tend not to decline with income, and most rates increase with education. (Professors, especially in the humanities and social sciences, however, tend to be less religious than the general public.) These statistics clearly highlight the potential import of religion, at least in the United States, and its likely influence on a large proportion of the population.

Our earlier assumption that many people both inside and outside the United States do not leave their thoughts about religion at the workplace door is akin to the notion that individuals’ attitudes, values, moods, skills, and behaviors spill over and influence their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and actions in organizations (e.g., Brief 1998, Edwards and Rothbard 2000). Indeed, a small number of organizational scholars have demonstrated that one’s religiosity and work outcomes are closely intertwined. For instance, Lynn et al. (2010) showed how religious beliefs and practices integrate with work for a sample of Christians in the United States. Additionally, Uhliman et al. (2011) demonstrated that when implicitly primed with words related to divine salvation (as opposed to nonreligious words), participants from a devout religious country were more likely to perform better on a work task than those from a relatively less religious country.

Given the earlier noted prevalence of the use of the term spirituality rather than religion in the management literature (practitioner and presumably scholarly), we think it best to clarify terminology before we move on.

Religiosity or Spirituality?

Secularism appears to have given rise to a tentative distinction between religiosity and spirituality (Turner et al. 1995). Yet at the core of both constructs is the personal or group search for the sacred, which can include God, the divine, and the transcendent (Hill and Pargament 2003). For religiosity, however, such a search occurs within a traditional sacred context with prescribed theology and rituals (Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005). Most people experience spirituality within an organized religious context (e.g., Marler and Hadaway 2002, Zinnbauer et al. 1999). However, there are some who consider themselves spiritual but are not a part of any traditional religious denomination (see Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000). To this end, religiosity and spirituality are best thought of as related, rather than independent (Hill et al. 2000), and spirituality can be viewed as a broader construct that includes religiosity (see Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005).

Religion (a subset of spirituality), our focal construct of interest, is concerned with “the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred” and “the means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people” (Hill et al. 2000, p. 66). Heeding Kaplan’s (1964) guidance, because religion is relatively unfamiliar territory in organizational research, our conceptualization of religion is inclusive rather than exclusive. We consider religion to include individuals’ religious beliefs/religiosity, their ritualistic behaviors (e.g., church attendance, prayer), and associations with religious denominations (e.g., Islam, Buddhism). Religiosity has been operationalized in a wide variety of ways (e.g., Hood et al. 2009); for this paper, we consider it to include but not be limited to intrinsic orientations (i.e., religion is a “master motive” or an end in and of itself in one’s life), extrinsic orientations (i.e., religion is used as a means to attain one’s goals), and fundamentalist orientations (i.e., conviction of the literal and absolute truth of one particular religion).1

Given the connectedness among spirituality, religion, and the belief in the sacred, and that most people consider themselves both spiritual and religious, why do religion and the concept of God so rarely appear in the management literature? Might it be that management scholars, like many others in the “public square,”
avoid mention of God (Sandelands 2003) because invoking God is considered a taboo. Like psychology (e.g., Beit-Hallahmi 1984), this restriction may be attributed in management to the consideration of religion being seen as unscientific.

But what about management spirituality articles? Although many of these writings are stimulating, some fall into a somewhat weak scientific mode in that they read more like theology resting on faith rather than scientific theory infused by empirical data (for example, see Krishnakumar and Neck 2002). Even proponents of workplace spirituality recognize this problem. Giacalone et al. (2005, p. 521) stated, “Inasmuch as workplace spirituality work was to a large extent driven by advocacy, workplace spirituality has been associated with a normative sense of goodness.” Indeed, a search of the 21 highest-ranked management journals (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin 1992) revealed that only four articles examining spirituality as a key topic were published over the past 10 years. In this paper, our aim is to help introduce the study of religion at work to a broader audience, for with few exceptions (e.g., Weaver and Agle 2002), it is rarely addressed in the top mainstream journals. By studying “religion at work,” we are not directly concerned with theological or philosophical approaches. We are not equipped to do so. Rather, our interests lie in the manifestation of thoughts in the workplace about religion and the influence of those thoughts on how people feel and act at work. Thus, we are adopting a psychological approach focused on affect, cognition, and behavior. Research in the other social sciences, however, such as economics (Iannaccone 1998), political science (Jost et al. 2004), and sociology (Weaver and Agle 2002), will be incorporated when appropriate. By ignoring theology and philosophy, we also exclude explicit consideration of a sizeable number of treatments driven by these perspectives that focus on religion and business ethics (e.g., Calkins 2000). Also not considered is a substantial body of research concerned with the Protestant work ethic (PWE); our decision here rests on the degree to which the construct has become secularized, largely losing its religious content (e.g., Furnham 1990). Specifically, in contemporary treatments, the PWE rarely conveys that work can be an earthly sign of salvation. As Weber (1958, p. 182) stated, “The idea of duty in one’s calling prows about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.” The Bellah et al. (1985) view of a calling seems to capture contemporary approaches emphasizing work performed for its own sake and for personal meaning (also see Bunderson and Thompson 2009).

We are aware that the study of religion obviously is value laden, as are the social sciences more generally (Kaplan 1964). A person may be an atheist, agnostic, or a believer; among believers, the religious bodies one could identify with and be influenced by are numerous. On balance, we are respectful of religion though not advocates per se. As such, we see beautiful acts of kindness done in the name of religion, as well as horrendous misdeeds. Thus, in this paper, we attempt to provide a balanced account by exploring the tensions between related benefits and challenges of religion at work.

**Tensions: The Benefits vs. the Challenges**

Religion is a double-edged sword. It has gifted the world with Mahatma Gandhi but also with the evil likes of Osama bin Laden (Silberman et al. 2005). Here, peace and war are not our concerns, but they may be seen as a backdrop to some of the issues we spotlight. More specifically, in this paper, we seek to bring balance to the study of religion in the organization literature by recognizing two exemplary tensions evident between the benefits religion may bring to a workplace and the potential costs it also may entail. Consequently, for each of the benefits God may bring to work, a discussion of a related countervailing force or challenge will follow (see Lewis’ 2000 guide on theoretically exploring tensions). For each of the tensions, we provide an initial exploration of the conditions under which one might prevail over the other. Although an important issue in its own right, we will not be addressing the topic of religious workers as potential targets of discrimination.

**Tension 1: Virtuousness vs. “More-Virtuous-Than-Thou”**

**Virtuousness.** We begin by examining the character or psychological traits of religious versus nonreligious organizational members. On one end of the tension, we expect, based on available research evidence among the adult population, that religious workers possess more character strengths (cf. Peterson and Seligman 2004). For example, religious individuals tend to be more hopeful (e.g., Koenig 2009), agreeable, and conscientious (e.g., Saroglou 2002), and to express the values of honesty (e.g., Katz et al. 1994) and forgiveness (e.g., Exline et al. 2004). Clearly, these character strengths suggest that more religious workers may view themselves as being and may actually be better—more virtuous organizational members, as well as better adjusted. For example, the facts that (a) one’s engagement in religious activities (e.g., reading religious materials, praying, attending services) is associated positively with the personality trait of conscientiousness (based on a meta-analytic study conducted by Saroglou 2002) and (b) this personality trait has been found to be associated positively with job performance (e.g., Hurtz and Donovan 2000) and integrity (e.g., Ones et al. 1993) suggest that religious workers may be especially valuable.

Indeed, Barro and McCleary (2003) provided cross-country-level evidence that religious beliefs, notably beliefs in heaven and hell, causally influenced economic growth. According to these researchers, religious beliefs...
lead individuals to work diligently and honestly, which in turn boosts productivity. The research of Parboteah et al. (2009) appears to corroborate this argument in that they found, in a sample of over 62,000 individuals in 45 countries, the cognitive and normative elements of national religious contexts (i.e., strong beliefs in God and frequent church attendance, respectively) were positively related to individuals’ beliefs that one must work diligently, for work is seen as an obligation to society.

“More-Virtuous-Than-Thou.” Based on the research reviewed, religiosity clearly has positive associations with various virtues and perhaps even the productivity of organizational members. However, this positive influence of religion might not necessarily come to fruition (e.g., religious individuals may not always be more hopeful and conscientious) because on the other end of the tension there lies a potential that certain religious individuals are less virtuous than they think they are. This is so because they are especially likely to fall victim to self-serving assessment biases (e.g., Sedikides and Gebauer 2010).

Researchers have repeatedly shown that people, on average, tend to think they are more charitable, cooperative, and fair than the typical person, as well as less belligerent, deceitful, mean, and unethical (e.g., Allinson et al. 1989). Epley and Dunning (2000), in the moral domain, labeled such self-serving assessments as “feeling holier than thou.” Such flawed self-assessments are not benign (e.g., see Dunning et al. 2004, pp. 90–97, regarding the workplace). For instance, people tend to evaluate others’ ethical conduct in a situation based on their forecasts of how they would behave in that situation, and given that these forecasts are based on egotistic self-characterizations, the ethical standards in use are biased upward, leading to overly harsh assessments of others (e.g., Alicke 1993; also see Tenbrunsel et al. 2010).

Humility is commonly associated with religion (e.g., Murray 2001), and Exline and Geyer (2004, p. 110) found that religiousness is associated with wanting to be more humble. But they also noted that “one potential barrier to humility for highly religious individuals might be religious pride, in which religious people see themselves as being ‘holier than thou.’…” Indeed, Rowatt et al. (2002) found that people for whom religion was the “master motive” in life saw themselves as more likely than others to follow biblical commandments (e.g., “do not steal”) and to exhibit more favorable nonreligious attributes (e.g., intelligence) and less unfavorable nonreligious attributes (e.g., phoniness). Supporting these findings, Sedikides and Gebauer’s (2010) meta-analysis showed a positive relationship between individuals’ intrinsic religiosity and their engagement in self-enhancement processes as operationalized by socially desirable responding. It appears that religiosity does not necessarily produce humility and may be related to overly harsh assessments of others. Based on the evidence reviewed, the latter seems especially probable in the moral domain but may likely generalize to assessments regarding, for example, intelligence and competence.

How might our posited more-virtuous-than-thou posture of the religious play itself out at work? We, for example, anticipate that these people, in a managerial role, would tend to judge their subordinates (especially those perceived to be nonreligious or of a different religious persuasion) to be, on average, less honest, kind, and smart than themselves. Such judgments would set the stage for the “Golem effect” (e.g., Oz and Eden 1994)—that is, managers with negative judgments in hand have low expectations for their subordinates and, therefore, may withhold emotional and professional support from them; the subordinates’ experiences are limited and their confidence lowered, leading to poor performance. On the contrary, the very same managers might generate positive organizational outcomes when relating with their bosses. Specifically, managers holding a more-virtuous-than-thou posture may be more likely to attempt to exercise influence upward (e.g., Mowday 1978), such as through issue selling, than managers who do not hold such stances. This is because perceiving themselves as better, more credible, and perhaps more powerful than others, more-virtuous-than-thou managers may view issue selling as less likely to harm their organizational images in the eyes of top management (Dutton and Ashford 1993). For organizations, issue selling serves a critical function in the decision-making process as it funnels important information and novel ideas from members closer to actual firm operations to top management (Dutton and Ashford 1993).

Additionally, raising the more-virtuous-than-thou notion up to the organizational level, religion may lead companies to believe that they are better than and morally superior to others (see Staw’s 1991 arguments for the relevance of individuals’ psychological processes on organizational actions). Worse, if Koerber and Neck (2006) are right, might firms with inflated beliefs of their own virtues alter the very organizational structures deemed crucial by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants for the deterrence of financial fraud? That is, when organizations believe their members are more virtuous than they are and can do no wrong, organizations may pay less attention to their structures, such as internal control policies, management oversight, and proper segregation of duties, thereby exposing themselves to greater risks of fraud. As Fry (2004, p. 166) noted, religion “can foster zealousy at the expense of organizational goals.” Obviously, these are three of many potential scenarios we could paint. The point is that linkages between religiosity, more-virtuous-than-thou postures, and organizational behavior appear worthy of thought and empirical examination.
Virtuousness vs. More-Virtuous-Than-Thou: When Might One Prevail Over the Other? To theorize about when virtuousness or a more-virtuous-than-thou posture may prevail, we turn to Gordon Allport’s (1952) conceptualization of intrinsic religiosity and the notion of self-identity threat (e.g., Burris and Navara 2002). Intrinsic religiosity, considered a healthy form of religiosity, reflects the extent to which religious faith is fully integrated into, or is the master motivator in, one’s life (Allport and Ross 1967). Allport (1952) theorized that consistent virtuous behaviors can only be exhibited by the intrinsically religious because they use their religious values (e.g., from “the Golden Rule”) to guide their behaviors. Empirical support for this theory comes from studies demonstrating that the intrinsically religious self-report possessing more virtues and engaging in more virtuous behaviors compared with their less religious counterparts (e.g., Saroglou 2002).

However, other studies have demonstrated that the virtues associated with an intrinsic religious orientation may be a product of socially desirable response tendencies (e.g., Sedikides and Gebauer 2010). Specifically, these studies show that the intrinsically religious present an appearance of being virtuous, explicitly rating themselves as being more tolerant and compassionate without providing behavioral evidence for their claim (i.e., being more-virtuous-than-thou; see Batson et al. 1993). Recent research on threats to self-identities suggests that the intrinsically religious may be either virtuous or more-virtuous-than-thou, depending on whether such threats exist in the work context. For instance, when Burris and Navara (2002) experimentally induced threat to participants’ self-identities (i.e., asked participants to recall and disclose a negative experience for which they felt responsible), the highly intrinsic religious participants were more likely to engage in self-protective cognitions (i.e., self-deception) than those who did not experience such a threat. This pattern did not hold for those scoring low in intrinsic religiosity; rather, they were less likely to engage in self-protective cognitions following a threat. Monin (2007) similarly asserted that threats to one’s moral identity (e.g., when one’s social comparison is seen as morally superior) can trigger one’s defense mechanism and cause one to hold the more-virtuous-than-thou posture. Indeed, Weaver and Agle (2002) proposed that religion plays a central role in one’s self-identity; departures from religious role expectations (i.e., threat to self-identity) result in dissonance, leading to efforts to alleviate such dissonance (see Festinger 1957).

We expect one such effort for the highly intrinsically religious would be to perceive the self in an enhanced light, thereby exacerbating one’s more-virtuous-than-thou tendencies.

The workplace is rife with potential threats to self-identity. In a qualitative study, Elsbach (2003), for instance, demonstrated that transitioning from traditional to nonterritorial offices threatened employees’ identities because it severely limited their ability to affirm their distinctiveness through the display of personal possessions. Less novel threats to people’s identities at work, such as those posed by stereotypes and power imbalance between groups at the societal level (e.g., Ely 1994), are also evident in the literature. Thus, we propose that the combination of intrinsically religious organizational members and the existence of self-identity threats in the workplace is not uncommon yet potentially detrimental, resulting in otherwise virtuous members succumbing to a more-virtuous-than-thou orientation.

Tension 2: Prosociality and Ethicality vs. Egocentrism

Prosociality and Ethicality. Religiosity has been associated positively with behaviors that help or benefit others, such as volunteering (e.g., Ruiter and De Graaf 2005), donating financially (e.g., Spilka et al. 2003), and being willing to help family members (Saroglou et al. 2007). Moreover, Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) demonstrated, in a diverse sample, that individuals primed with God concepts behave more generously in anonymous dictator games than when they were primed with neutral words. Such positive effects of religion on prosocial behaviors have been partly attributed to a common tenet for social behavior shared by most major world religions (e.g., Dividio et al. 2006). Specifically, most religions stress the importance of concern for others as illustrated by their incorporation of some form of the Golden Rule (e.g., “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18, NIV), “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others” (Analects 15:23, Confucius)). Consistent with the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), because values predict intentions and behaviors, religious people valuing principles such as caring for others likely will engage in more prosocial behaviors than the nonreligious, who may not be bound to abide by such principles.

We expect these religiosity–prosocial behavior associations to hold true in organizational contexts. Specifically, religious workers compared with nonreligious ones likely will engage in more extra-role behaviors intended to benefit the organization, such as prosocial organizational behaviors (see Brief and Motowidlo 1986). Indeed, Kutcher et al. (2010), using cross-sectional data, demonstrated that religious employees are likely to report performing more organizational citizenship behaviors than their nonreligious counterparts. This is the only empirical study, to our knowledge, that has examined the religiosity–prosocial organizational behaviors relationship. Future research examining this linkage likely will offer significant implications for the effectiveness and smooth functioning of organizations (see, for
example, the Podsakoff et al. 2009 meta-analysis demonstrating the positive consequences of organizational citizenship behaviors).

The benefits of religion for prosocial behavior plausibly will extend to ethical behavior (behavior where self-interest is often not the primary goal) in the workplace. There are, however, limited empirical studies demonstrating this potential religiosity–ethical behavior relationship, and even fewer have been conducted in workplace settings. The few modest religiosity–business-related ethical behavior studies that do exist reveal mixed results (see Weaver and Agle 2002), with some positive results indicating religiosity to be associated with less willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors (such as cheating on taxes; see Parboteah et al. 2008), and also some mixed results (see Weaver and Agle 2002), with some positive results indicating religiosity to be associated with less willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors (such as cheating on taxes; see Parboteah et al. 2008), and less willingness to pirate software (Wagner and Sanders 2001). Later, we will introduce the negative results and a sociological and political science approach to explaining the mixed results. However, for now, we focus on a psychological account for this religiosity–ethical behavior link.

Self-control has been argued to be necessary for people to behave ethically (Baumeister and Exline 1999). Baumeister et al. (1994) suggested that religion, as an external source of discipline, can be helpful to people in exercising self-control. Additionally, Geyer and Baumeister (2005) suggested that religious organizations facilitate self-monitoring, a key ingredient of self-control, through their traditions and rituals such as fasting and prayers. They further argued that religion can affect positive self-control by providing moral standards and motivating moral behavior. Indeed, Barnett et al. (1996) demonstrated that religious members have more uncompromising moral standards than their nonreligious counterparts and thus were more likely to blow the whistle on their cheating peers. Accordingly, it can be seen that by bringing religion to work, one brings moral standards that are adhered to, at least partially, by self-control.

Egocentrism. It appears that religion at work can produce organizational benefits by providing a means for workers to guide their behaviors in the realm of prosociality and ethicality. However, at the other end of this religiosity–prosociality and ethicality tension lies a potential for certain religious organizational members to possess egocentric tendencies in the form of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors directed at racial/ethnic minorities, gay men and lesbians, and other outgroup members.

Allport and Kramer (1946) have been identified as the first researchers to observe that churchgoers are more intolerant of ethnic minorities than nonattendees (Allport and Ross 1967). Over the years, that finding has been empirically and theoretically elaborated on in several ways (e.g., Batson et al. 1993). The most consistent findings in this literature are that measures of religious fundamentalism are associated with indices of intolerance toward various groups including ethnic minorities, women, and especially gay men and lesbians (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). Religious fundamentalism is defined as “the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic . . . inerrant truth about humanity and deity” (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992, p. 118) and can be thought of as “a strong, usually exclusive commitment to a given religion that guides one’s interaction with the world” (Jackson and Esses 1997, p. 895).

Several reasons have been advanced to explain the religion–prejudice linkage (e.g., Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). One provocative rationale suggests that religion, by justifying or explaining the social status quo (e.g., “God rewards those who lead a good life”), legitimates social structures and traditions. Thus, religion would be associated with prejudice if it justified existing inequalities. Indeed, Schwartz and Huismans (1995) found among participants of several Western religions that religiosity is associated positively with conservative values (e.g., tradition) and negatively with openness-to-change values. Furthermore, according to Hunsberger and Jackson (2005), values such as “freedom of opportunities,” held more strongly by the highly intrinsically religious compared to the less intrinsically religious and nonreligious (Burris et al. 2000), may paradoxically assist the highly intrinsically religious in masking and justifying their own prejudiced attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, when the intrinsically religious believe that “freedom of opportunity” is a reality rather than an ideal, they likely will blame minority groups for their own adverse situations, for example, by stereotyping them as unintelligent. In fact, Hinojosa and Park (2004) found American Evangelical Protestants especially likely to view the social disadvantage of African Americans as a product of a lack of motivation. This religious prejudice explanation is very much in line with system justification theory (e.g., Jost et al. 2004, p. 887), which in part posits that there is a need “to imbue the status quo with legitimacy and to see it as good, fair, natural, desirable, and even inevitable.” Religion can help fulfill such a need. We expect that religiosity is associated with prejudice at least partly through its effects on individuals’ justification of social status quo maintenance. Below, we provide two recent examples of religion–prejudice research and address its workplace import.

Regarding race, DiTomaso et al. (2003, p. 2), among a sample of whites in three areas of the United States, observed how the policy attitudes of religious conservatives, compared to those of nonreligious conservatives, “have been culturally constructed and mobilized to attack those public institutions that incorporated blacks as part of the Civil Rights Movement.” They found, for instance, that religious identification was strongly predictive of the belief that it is not the government’s business to ensure fair treatment. The religiously identified...
were categorized as such if they, in interviews, “talked
about the importance of their faith, their involvement in
their church, . . . and the influence of such . . . involvement
on their lives” (DiTomaso et al. 2003, p. 12). Given the
importance of and controversy surrounding affirmative action
(e.g., Crosby and VanDeVeer 2000), these are salient
results.

The targeted groups investigated most in recent
religion–prejudice research appear to be gay men and
lesbians. In a rare organizationally relevant study,
Horvath and Ryan (2003) demonstrated that religiosity,
measured by the frequency of church attendance and of
religious practices, as well as perceived importance of
religion to one’s life, is positively associated with beliefs
that there will be negative consequences from employ-
ing homosexuals. Outside of the work context, religious
fundamentalism has also been found to be correlated
positively with homosexual prejudices within samples of
Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims (see Hunsberger
1995). Few studies, however, have examined relation-
ships between religion and implicit attitudes toward gays
and lesbians. “Implicit attitudes” are unconscious, rel-
atively automatic evaluative reactions (Greenwald and
Banaji 1995), and as such, might be more insidious
than the more frequently studied explicit forms of prej-
duce. Rowatt et al. (2006) investigated religion–implicit
homosexual prejudice linkages in a sample of Protest-
tants and Catholics, finding religious fundamentalism to
be a strong predictor of negative implicit attitudes toward
gay men.

The reasons supplied for such findings vary, but often
are traced presumably to a literal interpretation of the
Bible emphasizing homosexuality as unnatural and per-
verse, and to a fundamentalist view that homosexuality is
a threat to the nuclear family and, thus, a threat to
society (Burdette et al. 2005). Empirically, Jackson and
Esses (1997) demonstrated that religious fundamental-
ists blame gays and lesbians for societal problems, such
as unemployment, through their perceptions that homo-
sexuals threaten their values. This attribution of blame
was found to translate into helping behaviors that are
patronizing in nature; that is, instead of engaging in
involved forms of helping such as providing incentives
for gays and lesbians to start up businesses, religious
fundamentalists in Jackson and Esses’ studies were more
likely to provide help in the form of “changing” gays
and lesbians to solve the problem. For example, reli-
gious fundamentalists may encourage gays and lesbians
to accept responsibility for their own problems and then
recommend that they participate in employment train-
ing programs in exchange for unemployment benefits.
Such forms of helping behavior, if mirrored in organi-
izations, can have a detrimental impact on organizational
members (whether they are racial minorities, gays and
lesbians, or other outgroup members) who seek help and
advice. The religion–prejudice associations highlighted
above clearly mean that to better understand employ-
ment discrimination and, hence, organizational diversity,
religion needs to be placed on the agenda in organiza-
tional research.

Prosociality and Ethicality vs. Egocentrism: When
Might One Prevail Over the Other? To explore the
conditions under which prosociality and ethicality or
egocentrism will prevail, we draw on the work of
both psychologists and sociologists. From a psycho-
logical perspective, the cognitive mechanisms resulting
from espousing two different religious moral princi-
pies (i.e., Preston et al. 2010) and moral disengage-
ment (Bandura 1999) are relevant. Preston et al. (2010)
recently reviewed and extended the literature on reli-
gion and prosocial behavior by providing an interest-
ing approach to examine the activation of prosocial
behaviors toward ingroup members and the dampen-
ing of such behaviors toward outsiders. According to
Preston et al. (2010), religion and belief in God are
related to prosocial behavior, but in different ways. The
religious principle emphasizes religious affiliation as a
social unit, with the main moral concern being ingroup
protection and cooperation, whereas the supernatural
principle derives from the belief in God as a moral
agent, with the key moral concern being virtue and
following the moral principles of God (cf. Haidt and
Joseph’s 2004 moral principles—ingroup/loyalty versus
harm/care). Depending on which moral principle reli-
gious organizational members espouse, their prosocial
behaviors toward ingroup versus outgroup members and,
by extension, their discriminatory behaviors directed at
members of the outgroup, will vary. The targets of such
behaviors therefore become crucial in understanding this
tension. Specifically, religious workers supporting the
supernatural principle likely will engage in more univer-
sal prosocial behaviors, helping and behaving ethically
toward both ingroup and outgroup members. Similarly,
for those upholding the religious principle, they likely
will behave prosocially toward their ingroup members.
In these cases, the religiosity–prosociality and ethicality
relationship prevails.

Drawing on the reasoning of Preston et al. (2010),
the religiosity–egocentrism linkage will prevail vis-à-
vis out-group members when religious workers uphold
the religious principle; the religious principle’s moral
concern of ingroup protection likely will fuel them to
engage in less prosocial and even more discriminatory
behaviors toward outgroup members. We contend that
it is not only the support of the religious principle that
might lead to egocentrism; rather, another psychological
mechanism may also be at play. For instance, Bushman
et al. (2007) showed that exposure to scriptural violence
sanctioned by God increased aggression in a sample of
undergraduate students. This was especially so for those
who believe in the scriptures. Bushman et al. (2007)
reasoned that when violence is perceived as morally justified through its sanctification by God, aggression is produced (cf. Berkowitz 1993). Moreover, Ginges et al. (2009) found regular religious service attendance to be associated with approval of suicide attacks against outgroup members via the abilities of those regularly attending religious services to strengthen within-group cooperation and widen the perceptual divide between ingroup and outgroup interests. The “us-versus-them” thinking encourages one to cast outsiders as unworthy of respect and even lacking in humanness (cf. Struch and Schwartz 1989). This dehumanization process tends to make one less inhibited to harm another (e.g., Bandura et al. 1975).

Moral justification and dehumanization are related to some of the cognitive mechanisms responsible for moral disengagement. Bandura (1999) argued that individuals are more likely to make unethical decisions when they morally disengage (i.e., when moral self-regulatory processes that usually curb unethical behavior are deactivated). By morally justifying a deviant act and by stripping one’s victims of human qualities, individuals can hurt their victims yet still preserve their own sense of morality. If there is something so powerful about religion and the concept of God that can trigger one’s moral disengagement processes, what might this mean for organizations and their members who frequently are confronted with decisions that are ethically charged? Through moral disengagement, religious workers might find it easier to act egocentrically and behave poorly toward their bosses, peers, and customers who are not of the same faith or who belong to the outgroup. The nature of moral principles espoused by religious organizational members together with moral disengagement processes likely will influence when religiosity-prosociality and ethically or religiosity-ego-centrism prevails.

From a sociological perspective, focusing on individuals’ cognitive processes is not sufficient to gauge the religiosity tension between prosociality/ethicality and ego-centrism. Weaver and Agle (2002) offered a provocative symbolic interactionist approach to explain the mixed empirical findings for the religiosity–ethical behavior linkage and when this relationship will prevail. According to this approach, individuals hold multiple role identities at any given point in time and will only engage in behaviors that are consistent with the expectations of a particular role identity when that identity is prominent. Weaver and Agle (2002) argued that individuals’ religious role identities are “switched on” when religious-relevant contextual cues are salient in the organization (e.g., the presence of religious artifacts and coreligionists). Under such conditions, religious workers likely will engage in behaviors that are in accordance with the moral expectations specified by their religion. For Weaver and Agle (2002), these behaviors are perceived to be ethical ones, but surely they can be extended to include prosocial behaviors, particularly when religious members who uphold the supernatural principle (Preston et al. 2010) or principles of concern for others (e.g., the Golden Rule) work in organizations where religious cues are salient. In these cases, the religiosity–prosociality and ethicality relationship may be promoted. Alternatively, when religious members embedded in religiously salient organizations espouse the religious principle (Preston et al. 2010) or believe, for example, that homosexuality is a threat to society, the religiosity–ego-centrism relationship may prevail.

**Tensions Recap**

We have explored the tensions religion can build in organizations by demonstrating how the religiosity of organizational members may manifest itself in admirable as well as potentially troublesome ways. Again, our intent is not to advocate that God occupy the corner office or that religion be banned from the workplace. Rather, we hope to promote the study of religion at work by enticing organizational scholars to investigate the tensions between the benefits/adaptive outcomes and the challenges/maladaptive outcomes produced by religion at work, as well as to explore the conditions under which one might prevail over the other. In our analysis of two exemplary cases representing the struggle between the benefits and challenges, we observe that the two tensions are in fact held together by a common thread. Specifically, the forces we identified as potentially responsible for driving challenges to prevail over benefits, or vice versa, can be categorized into (1) individuals’ religiosity and beliefs in and relationships with God (e.g., the intrinsically religious, those who subscribe to religious versus supernatural principles) and (2) the contexts within which religious organizational members are embedded (e.g., contexts posing self-identity threats or laden with religious stimuli). In the “right” combination, these forces can drive either adaptive or maladaptive outcomes. Until now, we have focused principally on individuals’ beliefs. In the next section, we provide a somewhat fuller treatment of the role of the context in which a person’s religion may manifest itself. By introducing more aggregate issues such as organizational and nation-state-level religiosity, we provide a broader theoretical framework for the study of religion at work that acknowledges the tensions between the benefits and the challenges.

**Religion in Context**

This paper was opened by recognizing the existence of Christian owned and operated businesses. We assert, based on theory (e.g., Schneider 1987), that religious Christians are attracted to these firms, hired by them, and remain with them. We theorize that religious Christians embedded in such a firm may behave differently than
they would in more secular organizations (cf. Weaver and Agle 2002). More specifically, we anticipate that the sorts of religiosity–organizational behavior relationships proposed will be stronger the more the work environment primes religion, thus making one’s religion and religious role identity more salient. For example, in line with Weaver and Agle’s (2002) symbolic interactionist theory, one could build an argument that an organization populated by Protestants (whether they be intrinsics or fundamentalists) who espouse the religious as opposed to supernatural principle (Preston et al. 2010) may be unreceptive to outgroup members.

Consistent with this reasoning, Salvador et al. (2010) found that religious fundamentalism interacted with workplace priming of religion to predict discrimination against gay and lesbian customers in an experiment that created a simulated work environment. These findings were later replicated in the field. In 28 organizations, Salvador et al. (2010) demonstrated that fundamentalist religious workers were more willing to discriminate against gay and lesbian coworkers when their workplace possessed contextual cues that made religion salient. Such cues included coworkers displaying items of religious significance (e.g., prayer beads) in their work areas and company mission statements reflecting religious values. It is important to note that without such workplace cues, no discrimination was detected in the field study; the religiosity–ethicality relationship prevailed.

Christian owned and operated businesses (or those owned and managed by other faiths) present another issue possibly worthy of research attention: religiosity as an organizational attribute. Such an attribute might be gauged in multiple ways, for example, by explicit reference to the belief in God and religion in company documents, policies, and procedures, or by aggregating the religiosity of a firm’s employees. Then, one might theorize how and when collective religiosity is related to both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes. For instance, collective religiosity has the potential to lead to unfair employment discrimination (e.g., collective religiosity may be associated with excluding outgroup members) and may make for an uncomfortable work environment for those workers who are religiously dissimilar from the majority. The veracity of these expectations, however, depends on whether there is the “right” combination of individuals’ beliefs in God and context. For example, if a firm’s religious employees collectively espouse the religious as opposed to the supernatural principle, and religious cues are prominent in that firm, the proposed religiosity–egocentrism relationship may prevail. These expectations are empirical questions in need of future research.

More positively, perhaps, let us take the case of the restaurant chain Chick-fil-A and founder, chairman, and chief executive officer S. Truett Cathy. Cathy is described in his company biography as one who “built his life and business based on hard work, humanity and biblical principles. Based on these principles, all of Chick-fil-A restaurants operate with a ‘closed-on-Sunday’ policy—without exception” (Chick-fil-A 2012a). The company explains its closed-on-Sunday policy in the following statement: “Cathy credits ‘blessings from the Lord’ for the great success the company has enjoyed, and he remains as committed as ever to maintaining the closed-on-Sunday policy” (Chick-fil-A 2012b). The question becomes, does a company like Chick-fil-A, other than closing on Sundays, behave differently than presumably more secular organizations such as Burger King and McDonalds? Clearly, we expect that firms that are more faith-based do act differently. How so? Will workers embedded in such faith-based firms be more virtuous and engage in more prosocial organizational behaviors than those in secular companies? There is some provocative preliminary evidence that suggests this may be so, at least for intragroup prosocial organizational behaviors within faith-based firms. Norenzayan and Shariff (2008) provided empirical data from anthropology and sociology to show that religious communes, compared with secular ones, impose twice as many costly requirements for membership, such as fasting and restrictions of material possessions and sex, and that those religious communes enjoy greater longevity. The researchers partially attributed the survival advantage of religious communes to greater intragroup prosociality and cooperation, for the sacrifice members make to stay in such communes is costly and it is to their benefit to help each other and preserve the commune as a going concern. Consistently, Henrich et al. (2010), across 15 diverse populations ranging from Missouri to Papua New Guinea, observed that as the percentage of a sample reported practicing either Islam or Christianity increased, so did their cooperative and fair treatment of one another. Would such findings regarding prosociality and cooperation hold true at Chick-fil-A and other faith-based firms? We expect so. But these are questions organizational theory and research need to address.

Taking context to an even higher level of analysis, we briefly turn to the religious environment in which organizations are embedded. Will, for instance, banks operating in Islamic-dominated states behave differently than those located in more secular nations? Very much so. Islamic banking practices rest on several principles that distinguish them from more secular ones. These principles, for example, include (1) prohibitions against interest, contractual uncertainty and speculation, and dealings with industries related to pork, pornography, and alcoholic beverages; and (2) reliance on rulings issued by qualified Muslim scholars as they pertain to Islamic finance (e.g., Solé 2007, Yaquby 2005). At the organizational level, these principles translate, for instance, into a
governance structure that incorporates a Sharia Supervisory Board, or at the very minimum a Sharia counselor (e.g., Suleiman 2005, Weir 2004). Sharia is the Islamic legal code derived from the Koran and the writings of Muhammad. Beyond the firm, the principles have led to the creation of the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions, whose goals include the design and dissemination of accounting and auditing standards that can be applied by all Islamic institutions (e.g., Solé 2007). Islamic banking is very different from secular banking and is growing rapidly (e.g., Weir 2004).

Admittedly, we chose banking in Islamic countries as a rather easy way to demonstrate how state religiosity may affect the behavior of organizations. Obviously, the Islamic world is more diverse and complex than we have depicted. Regarding diversity, Islamic countries range from the small, wealthy, relatively liberal Qatar to the large, poor, conservative Yemen; regarding complexity, Samuel L. Hayes III, an expert on Islamic finance, observed that Western women doing business in Islamic countries almost constitute a “third sex,” for they are seen as so special and different from the genders in these countries (Lagace 2002). Relatively, Moore and Vanneman (2003) provided a very interesting twist to existing research on conservative religiosity and attitudes toward gender roles. Analyzing a survey of a representative sample in the United States, they found, after controlling for individuals’ religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices, a statistically significant positive relationship between the proportion of fundamentalists in a state and conservative gender attitudes of white individuals in that state. Consistent with the finding of Brief et al. (2005) that the racial demographics of communities matter in influencing organizational members’ racial attitudes, we expect Moore and Vanneman’s (2003) findings imply that a community’s religious demographics may influence gender attitudes in organizations.

Recent research in psychology and sociology suggests that the religious environment in which organizations are embedded will have more far-reaching effects on organizations than just their gender attitudes and, hence, their diversity management. Using representative samples of the world, Diener et al. (2011) demonstrated that religiosity has the most beneficial effect on individuals’ subjective well-being when they are embedded in a society where a large segment of the population is religious, and it has the least helpful effect in a society where the religious are in the minority. These findings suggest that organizations embedded in communities where a majority of the population is religious may have different profiles than organizations embedded in communities with the religious being in the minority. In the religious–ethicallity domain, Finke and Adamczyk’s (2008) analysis of two world surveys demonstrated that national religious contexts help shape individuals’ opinions on morality. Their findings imply that the (un)ethical stance and behaviors of organizations may depend on the religiosity of the nations in which they are embedded.

At the nation-state level, the degree of separation between church and state also may impact the outcomes we examined. In a study of 152 nation-states, Fox (2006) observed that only in the United States is there no state support for religion and no state restrictions on religion. Moreover, he found that the U.S. government involvement in religion is on the increase, albeit slightly. However, it should be noted that Americans are the most religious in the industrialized world (see for example, Diener et al. 2011). The lesson is that the United States is a unique context for studying religion in the workplace.

Rather than looking at the nation-state level, one could examine religion through the lens of culture (e.g., Geertz 1973, Tarakeshwar et al. 2003). Doing so opens the door to studying the influence of religious cultures within nation-states (e.g., Cohen 2009, Cohen and Hill 2007). The only organizational work in this vein that we are aware of was conducted by Sanchez-Burks (2002). He, for example, demonstrated that American participants high in Protestant relational ideology (PRI; e.g., Calvinist Protestants), in a business frame of mind, were less attentive to emotional tone than members of other religions. PRI is a cultural construct derived from Sanchez-Burks’ (2005, p. 265) analysis of the Protestant Reformation and defined as “a deep-seated belief that affective and relational concerns are considered inappropriate in work settings, and, therefore are to be given less attention than in social, non-work settings.” Sanchez-Burks’ findings likely will have an impact on how organizations manage intercultural miscommunication and conflicts.

In this section, we have recognized five possibilities regarding context: (1) the workplace can serve to prime an employee’s religiosity, (2) businesses themselves can be viewed in terms of their religiosity, (3) the religiosity of a nation-state can affect the practices of businesses located in it, (4) religious cultures within a nation-state may influence attitudes and behaviors in organizations, and (5) the religiosity of a nation-state and culture may moderate the effects of (1) and (2) on outcomes. We have just surfaced the tip of the iceberg in terms of the import of religious context on the behavior of organizations and their members, and many important questions await future theorizing and research. For example, how do the different levels of analysis of context affect the two tensions discussed and whether benefits prevail over challenges? Specifically, how might the levels differentially influence whether positive or negative outcomes ensue? As another example, what are the consequences for an organization and its members when the religiosity of the workplace does not match that of the individual worker?
Furthermore, students of marketing have long recognized that religion influences what goods and services are traded and how and when they are traded (e.g., Mittelstaedt 2002). For instance, Islam influences how banks based outside of Islamic countries operate and provide services (e.g., Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation). Similarly, financial institutions such as Cordoba Gold in the United Kingdom are beginning to provide services that are more in line with the moral standards of Sharia, such as the introduction of Sharia-compliant prepaid credit cards, whereby no interest is paid or received by the company. Clearly, there is much to learn about how religion influences organizational life.

Concluding Thoughts

At the individual level of analysis, we have demonstrated that religiosity, tapped in a variety of ways, can build tensions between adaptive and maladaptive outcomes in the workplace. It is important to note that the tensions we addressed are mere examples. Others clearly exist. Not attended to, for instance, is the plausible tension between enhanced (e.g., Ellison et al. 2000, Smith et al. 2003) and diminished well-being (e.g., Dezutter et al. 2006, Ryan et al. 1993) produced by religion. We also have proposed initial sets of conditions under which benefits prevail over challenges and challenges prevail over benefits. What we have not addressed is when religiosity will not matter organizationally. In part, we anticipate that the influence of religiosity will vary as a function of the criterion that is the focus of attention, with observed relationships being positive, negative, or null. Moreover, we propose that the strength of such relationships is likely to be moderated by organizational context (e.g., the proportion of coworkers with similar levels of religiosity). Finally, beyond the individual level of analysis, we briefly considered the organizational consequences of collective religiosity at the firm and nation-state levels. Largely under the guise of spirituality, religion at work has been advocated by some observers of organizations, but very limited scholarship is in evidence. Indeed, studying religion at work may be taboo. One reason for this state of affairs may be the false view that the study of religion in the workplace belongs to theologians and philosophers, not social scientists—that it is best not to mix religion and science. Another reason for the taboo may be the fear of being seen as potentially attacking religion.

Religion and contemplations about the concept of God are part of many people’s lives. To assume, by neglect, that religion does not play a role in organizational life leaves us with an incomplete organizational science.

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Endnotes

1 Although our construal of religion includes fundamentalism, it is silent on the level of activism/extremism that may be engaged in by such groups. As recognized, for example, by Othman (2006), in addressing fundamentalist Islamist groups, activism/extremism may range from political violence (i.e., militant Islam or jihadic Islam) to peaceful but politicized proselytizing and social reform projects (i.e., dakwah or da’awa Islamic movements). The topic of activism, and, in particular, extremism, is therefore beyond the scope of the current inquiry (but for more on the topic, see, for instance, Iannaccone and Berman 2006, Kressel 2007).

2 We share our religious attachments here, for one’s religious beliefs (including ours) may not be neutral; that is, beliefs often stand behind specific attitudes and behaviors. One of us was reared in Buddhist/Confucianist traditions, rarely visits a temple, and is slightly religious; one of us is an affiliated Jew attending services occasionally; and another of us was raised as a Christian.

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