Religion and Organization Theory
Taking religion seriously in the study of organizations
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Despite its central importance in nearly all societies, religion has been largely neglected in the study of organizations and management. In this introduction to the volume on religion and organization theory, we argue that such neglect limits unnecessarily the relevance and scope of organization and management theory (OMT) and that there is therefore great value in connecting organizational research with a deeper appreciation and concern for religion. We begin by speculating about some of the reasons why organization and management theorists are hesitant to study religion, and go on to discuss some nascent points of contact between religion and OMT. We conclude with a discussion of the articles in this volume, which represent an attempt to remedy this unfortunate blind spot within OMT scholarship.

Keywords: Religion and organization theory; religion and management; religious organizations
Our motivation for this volume was sparked by the simple observation that while religion plays such an obvious and prominent role in virtually every society and economy, organization and management theorists have largely ignored it. This is true both with respect to the study of religion in secular organizations and the study of religious organizations themselves. Indeed, a recent review of the management literature from 1950 to 2011 by Tracey (2012) identified just 86 papers across 21 of the main management journals that engage to greater or lesser degrees with the notion of religion. We find it puzzling and unfortunate that management scholars have so studiously avoided one of the most pervasive influences on organizations.

While the implicit assumption in organization and management research is that religion has only marginal relevance for contemporary organizations, there is arguably only one part of the world in which such an assumption might hold sway — namely Western Europe — some of whose constituent countries have been described as “post-Christian” societies. Even in this context, however, it is hard to sustain the argument that religion is irrelevant. Indeed, two of the editors of this volume live in the United Kingdom, and we have often been struck by the relatively high profile occupied by religion in the media and popular press. In fact, at the time of writing debates about gay marriage, gay ministers in the Church of Scotland, women priests in the Church of England, and attempts to deport alleged Islamic “hate preachers” feature prominently in media discourse.

It is important to note that there has been some significant research on religion and organization. In the sociology of religion, scholars such as Mark Chaves and Melissa Wilde have studied religion through the lens of institutional theory and social movement theory, drawing on a set of assumptions about culture and the social environment that is consistent with mainstream thinking in organization theory (see, e.g., Chaves, 1996 and Wilde, Geraty, Nelson, & Bowman, 2010). And in organization theory itself, there has also been a small number very important contributions, some of which were written by authors featured in this volume (e.g., Bartunek, 1984; Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; Dyck & Wiebe, 2012; Hinings & Bryman, 1974; Weaver & Agle, 2002).

These contributions notwithstanding, we believe there is a clear case for greater attention and focus on the study of religion by organization and management theory (OMT) researchers. Our sense is that our view is widely shared, but that many scholars are reluctant to work in this area because they are skeptical that journals will want to publish papers on the topic and are nervous about how business school Deans will react given the current drive toward the alignment of teaching and research (Tushman &
O’Reilly, 2007). Others may feel that religion is a personal matter and not an appropriate topic for academic study and publishing.

We believe that such concerns are misplaced. First, we think that the study of religious organizations may generate significant novel insights on a range of topics and issues — such as identity, culture, and motivation — with clear relevance for organizations of all kinds. Second, organizational members do not set aside their religious beliefs and practices when they become organizational members, and in the United States there is evidence of religious practices becoming formalized in corporate settings (Tracey, 2012). More broadly, we believe that part of the intellectual project of management research involves building knowledge about social and behavioral processes in all kinds of organization; a sole focus on commercial organizations is incompatible with such an endeavor.

The remainder of this volume introduction is structured as follows. We begin by discussing some of the causes of the current lack of attention to religion in OMT. While our points in this section are somewhat speculative, we believe it is useful to start a discussion that will hopefully inspire a wider conversation on this topic. Second, we explore some of the areas where a nascent connection between religion and OMT already exists. Our intention here is to point to some of the “low hanging fruit” with the potential to augment significantly existing streams of research. Finally, we discuss each of the articles that are included in this volume and highlight the contributions that they make toward a fuller understanding of religion and organization.

**BARRIERS TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN OMT**

While we believe there is a strong rationale for organization and management scholars to engage more deeply with religion, we also think it is important to consider the reasons why OMT scholars have not engaged sufficiently with religion to date. In this section, we focus on three possible explanations that we have encountered, and argue that none should stand in the way of future research on religion in our field.

*Religion as a Private Affair*

One significant barrier to the study of religion in OMT arises from the view that religion is a private affair. Interestingly, this belief emanates from an
important societal change that occurred during the transition from pre-modernity to modernity in the West. As part of this fundamental shift, religion was split from government and business and came to be viewed as a private activity. The result was that religion was no longer bound up, at least in a formal sense, in the workings of important public institutions. Even the ancient universities, founded by popes and kings to train lawyers, doctors, and priests and modeled on monasteries, found themselves increasingly secular and disconnected from the religions that played such an important role in their creation and management. This was undoubtedly related to the rise of Protestantism in Europe and North America, but was also part of the move toward more rational forms of organization (Weber, 1978/1919).

Thus, while religion has retained a profound influence in most contemporary societies, in the West at least, the nature of this influence has changed. And, as religion became separated from government and business, individuals—including researchers from the OMT community—were perhaps left with a sense that it is not appropriate to talk about religion while participating in the public sphere. It is surely ironic that while religion plays a central role in Weber’s (1978/1919) explanation of the rise of modern capitalism, the intellectual descendants of Weber quickly expunged religion as an explanatory category in the study of organizations due to the very processes that Weber describes. The upshot is that a field founded partly on a concern for religion as a central social force has, paradoxically, abandoned its study.

The Importance of Religion in Contemporary Societies

A second explanation for the paucity of work on religion and organization is the myth of the declining importance of religion. As mentioned above, there has been an officially sanctioned separation of church and state in Western societies, and this is often taken as the starting point for secularization theory. But the main claims of secularization theory go well beyond the idea that the scope of religious authority no longer reaches into government and commercial institutions (Swatos & Christiano, 1999). Indeed, the central claim of secularization theory is that the influence of religion on all aspects of social life has long been in decline, that people are essentially less religious than they used to be (i.e., that they engage in fewer religious practices and their behavior is less influenced by religious beliefs than hitherto), and that this process of decreasing religiosity continues apace (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). Berger (1967) described this as a “secularization of
consciousness” which is rooted in the production in the West of “an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations” (pp. 107–108).

Secularization theory has been criticized on two main grounds (Stark, 1999). First, it assumes that there was in the past a period in history when the world was filled with sacred people. And yet, in the United States church attendance has more than trebled in the last century and a half and even in Europe there has been “no demonstrable long-term decline in ... religious participation” (p. 254). Second, in additional to statistical data, levels of subjective religiousness remain remarkably high in both the United States and Europe. As Stark notes, “to classify a nation as highly secularized when most of its inhabitants believe in God is absurd” (p. 254). The result is that secularization theory has struggled to retain intellectual credibility in the sociology of religion, with Peter Berger (1997), one of its most articulate proponents, subsequently distancing himself from the theory. If one accepts the position that religion in much of the world is more, rather than less, important than it used to be, then the reluctance of management and organization theorists to engage with the topic of religion is surely even more disconcerting.

Not an Appropriate Object of Study

A final explanation for religion’s marginal place in OMT is the apparent belief that religion is not an appropriate object of scientific study. From this perspective, the study of religion is not something that “serious” scholars would engage in, nor is it amenable to systematic analysis in any case. While sociologists (see Clarke, 2008 for an overview) and psychologists (see Paloutzian & Park, 2005 for an overview) seem to have little problem with the idea of religion as a core social phenomenon, organization and management theorists seem uncomfortable with the idea.

We believe that this discomfort parallels the discomfort that researchers feel for a range research topics including emotion, envy, love, and even family (to the extent that the mainstream research community seems unwilling to accept as legitimate the study of “family business”). The reasons for this are complex, but we believe they are rooted in the very foundations of the field. More specifically, both the theory and practice of management are rooted in notions of rational choice and an associated set of neo-economic assumptions about human behavior and preferences (Shenhav, 2002). Anything that makes individuals act in a seemingly
irrational way undermines the assumption that human action is predictable, which strikes at the core of OMT as it is currently constituted.

Think for example, of the often-reported actions of organization members who break rules and endanger their careers due to a workplace infatuation. Anyone who inhabits a university has seen this happen with faculty–student relationships that threaten careers and marriages. Yet, organizational members make seemingly irrational choices to enter into these relationships only to regret their actions and end up asking themselves “what was I thinking?” The best defense for OMT scholars faced with irrationality in the decision making of organizational members has been to ignore the aspects of organizational behavior that don’t fit with their defining and legitimating assumptions. In this process, religion has, unfortunately, been consigned to the category of phenomena that we know to be critically important to organizations from our personal experience, but that do not appear prominently in our theories.

While the three barriers outlined above have served to prevent the inclusion of religion in the study of organizations, each of them is easily refuted and fails to stand up to even moderate examination. We are therefore hopeful that opening up a broader discussion about religion and organization can function as a catalyst to bring together interested researchers and rehabilitate the study of religion in OMT.

**FRAMING THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN OMT**

While there has been a general failure to include religion in the main currents of OMT, there have been attempts to link the two. Moreover, there are a number of theories in management where we believe the connection with religion offers particular promise for future research. In this section we briefly sketch out three topic areas where there is already a connection of some sort between religion and OMT, and where we believe there is significant opportunities to advance theorizing. The three areas discussed here are not, of course, meant to be exhaustive, but are designed to illustrate the potential of religion as a topic in OMT research.

*Identity and Religion*

Perhaps the research area in OMT with the most obvious connection to religion is identity. Research on identity has a long history, with writings
on the topic beginning with the ancient Greeks. It has become one of the most influential concepts in social science and occupies an important place across many different literatures (see Stryker & Burke, 2000). At its core, the literature on identity focuses on how individuals and groups of various kinds answer two fundamental questions: “who am I?” and “who are you?” Both of these questions are concerned intimately with religious beliefs and the membership of religious organizations. It is unsurprising, therefore, that religion plays a central role in discussions of identity across the social sciences, with OMT a notable exception.

The concept of identity appears in OMT in a number of related but distinct versions applied at different levels and based on understandings of identity drawn from different areas of social science. In our discussion here, we will consider three distinct levels of analysis — individual identity, organizational identity, and collective identity.

Interest in identity among OMT scholars begins at the individual level. OMT researchers generally view individual identity as some combination of who an individual is from the perspective of a group and/or how an individual defines him or herself. For example, social identity theory, one of the dominant perspectives on identity in OMT, conceptualizes individual identity as the combination of a personal identity made up of idiosyncratic elements such as abilities, interests and psychological traits, and social identity made up of salient group classifications (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

In work on individual identity in the psychology and sociology literatures, religion is understood to be one of the key defining categories through which people understand each other and themselves. Religion is universal (even agnostics and atheists are identifiable groups due to their beliefs about religion) and knowing what faith someone belongs to is intrinsic to knowing who they are in much of the world. The importance of religion to individual identity is perhaps illustrated most obviously by the ubiquitous nature of religious conflict through time and across space. From the Crusades in the Middle Ages to present-day Myanmar, enduring and intractable conflict between religious groups has been the global norm. The profound and enduring nature of these conflicts suggests that religion is a fundamental source of identity with unique dynamics that require special consideration and theorizing. We therefore believe that OMT scholars interested in individual identity have much to gain from including an explicit connection to religion in their theoretical and empirical work.

Identity is also an important concept at the organizational level of analysis. From this perspective, an organization’s identity is understood as those organizational attributes that members perceive as central, enduring,
and distinctive (Albert & Whetten, 1985). An organization’s identity provides a framework for members’ interpretations of events and therefore influences their subsequent action. Organizational identity helps members relate to the context within which they act and to make sense of organizational events (Fiol, 1991). Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) argue that a desirable organizational identity influences the degree to which members identify with the organization, assimilate its core values, and accept its goals as their own. In a similar vein, Gioia and Thomas (1996) argue that decision makers’ perceptions of organizational identity affect sensemaking processes as it defines the context for issue interpretation.

Religion has not featured prominently in the study of organizational identity to date, but there are two obvious ways in which it is clearly important. First, religious organizations such as Catholic schools and Islamic banks are defined fundamentally by religious beliefs and adhere to principles and structures associated with them. However, the identity of religious organizations is not defined exclusively by religion. For example, the educational mission of Catholic schools is fundamental to their identity. Yet little is known about the relationship between religion and other aspects of identity in religious organizations. Second, religion plays an important part in the organizational identity of many nonreligious organizations due to founder effects or the religious beliefs of organizational members. But the role of religion in shaping organizational identity in nonreligious organizations has so far largely been ignored by organization theorists.

The third stream of literature focusing on identity in OMT explores collective identities, or identities that “encompass multiple organizations” (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011, p. 449). Examples identified in the literature include social enterprise versus traditional charities (Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011), classical versus nouvelle cuisine French restaurants (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), and industrial versus craft brewers (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). While a relatively recent development in OMT scholarship, this area of research is growing rapidly and connections to other theoretical perspectives, such as institutional theory, are increasingly apparent.

We believe that collective identity, like social and organizational identity, is often intimately connected to religion. Thus, religious organizations that belong to the same category tend to share a sense of common identity. From this perspective, religious organizations construct their identities not only in relation to other organizations of the same type, but also by emphasizing differences from organizations that are members of other categories. For example, at the core of the identity of evangelical churches is a belief that they represent a kind of Christianity that engages directly with the
Holy Spirit and is filled with great energy, joy, and hope. However, part of their identity work also involves distinguishing themselves from other more conservative churches that are often viewed, from an evangelical perspective, as staid.

**Institutional Theory and Religion**

From rather modest beginnings in the 1970s, institutional theory has become the dominant theoretical perspective in OMT. Broadly speaking, institutions are defined as conventions that are self-policing (e.g., Douglas, 1986), and institutional theory, by extension, is the study of these conventions. Within the tradition of new institutional theory, institutions are defined more specifically as “historical accretions of past practices and understandings that set conditions on action” through the way in which they “gradually acquire the moral and ontological status of taken-for-granted facts which, in turn, shape future interactions and negotiations” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 99).

Central to institutional theory in OMT is the idea of an organizational field defined as “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organizations that produce similar services” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 143) and that develop mutual awareness, and see themselves as part of the same community and involved in a common enterprise (Scott, 2001). These groupings of organizations are important as they share sets of institutions including practices, organizational forms and, most importantly for us here, institutional logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012).

Institutional logics are symbols, ideas and taken-for-granted rules that shape cognition, emotion, and action by furnishing “assumptions and values, usually implicit, about how to interpret organizational reality, what constitutes appropriate behavior, and how to succeed” (Thornton, 2004, p. 70). In particular, they provide social actors with formal and informal rules of action and interaction, cultural norms and beliefs for interpretation, and implicit principles about what constitute legitimate goals and how they may be achieved (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

Building on Friedland and Alford (1991) and Thornton (2004), Thornton et al. (2012) provide a typology of seven ideal typical institutional orders and logics: the market, the corporation, the professions, the state, the family, community, and religion. In contradistinction to the
emphasis on homogeneity and taken-for-grantedness in the new institutionalism, the institutional logics perspective emphasizes struggle, conflict, and change rooted in the fact that many institutional fields are characterized by the coexistence of multiple different institutional prescriptions (e.g., Kraatz & Block, 2008; Lounsbury, 2007; Pache & Santos, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2005). For organizations, this often leads to a situation of “institutional complexity” as they try to cope with and manage divergent interests, goals and practices rooted in multiple institutional logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). Hospitals and health care organizations (Reay & Hinings, 2005), arts organizations (Alexander, 1996), and non-profit and social organizations (Tracey et al., 2011) are all examples of organizations facing institutional environments that exert multiple and potentially conflicting institutional demands.

Yet as far as we are aware, there are no studies in institutional theory that consider competing institutional demands with respect to the logic of religion (but see Greenwood, Diaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010 and the extensive work of Roger Friedland — e.g., Friedland, 2002, 2009). Given the role of religion in contemporary societies, outlined above, this is surprising. For example, Tracey (2012) notes that Islamic banking combines the logic of the market with the logic of religion, and represents an intriguing object of study for institutional theorists. Specifically, in order to overcome the areas of conflict between Islam and markets, Islamic financial institutions work according to four basic principles — paying interest is not allowed, risk and reward must be shared, speculation is not allowed, risk is only allowed when information is shared — each of which is derived from the Quran and Sunna (Di Mauro et al., 2013). This has led to the development of a series of innovative practices that have allowed Islamic banks to circumvent the problems faced by many Western banks since the 2008 financial crisis. These and other organizational contexts where the logic of religion meets other institutional logics, including other religious logics, offers significant potential to enrich the study of institutional complexity and the dynamics of society and economy.

Stigma, Organizations, and the Study of Religion

A final area of research in OMT that we believe could benefit from connecting with religion pertains to stigma. There is a long tradition in social psychology and sociology of studying stigma at the individual level of analysis, much of which is anchored in Goffman’s (1963) seminal work on “the
management of spoiled identity.” For Goffman, stigma is a distinguishing mark that indicates that a person has an inferior moral status. This “mark” might relate to physical characteristics, deviant behavior, or group membership. More recently, organizational researchers have sought to conceptualize the notion of stigma at the organizational level. Devers, Dewett, Mishina, and Belsito (2009, p. 157) define organizational stigma as “a label that evokes a collective stakeholder group-specific perception that an organization possesses a fundamental deep-seated flaw that deindividuates and discredits the organization.” Interestingly, with some important exceptions (e.g., Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Sutton & Callahan, 1987; Vergne, 2012), there has been surprisingly little empirical work on stigma at the organizational level, and here we believe the connection with religion offers important opportunities.

It is notable that sociologists of religion have taken an interest in the notion of stigma, but they appear to focus on the individual-level effects of belonging to a faith or religious organization that is stigmatized. For example, Iannaccone (1992, p. 272) posits that “[e]fficient religions with perfectly rational members may … embrace stigma, self-sacrifice, and bizarre behavioral standards” in order to “screen out people whose participation would otherwise be low,” while Cline and Ferraro (2006, p. 271) speculate that religious organizations may “provide a ‘religious haven’ — a consoling and welcoming setting for people who are … seeking protection from social stigma.” It would be fascinating to examine the relationship between stigma and religion at the organizational level. Specifically, what are the effects of stigma on religious organizations with respect to, for example, access to resources, organizational identity, and relationships with stakeholders? Answering these questions has the potential to push the boundaries of both OMT and the study of religion. It would also be interesting to study the experiences of individuals who are members of stigmatized religions within secular organizations. For example, it had been reported that Muslims in the United States have experienced significantly increased discrimination in the workplace since 9/11, but the voices of the Muslim minority do not feature prominently in mainstream organizational research.

THE ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THIS VOLUME

This volume of Research in the Sociology of Organizations contains 11 articles that we believe push forward our understanding of religion and
organization in important ways. The article by Bruno Dyck provides a valuable review of the management literature on religion. Intriguingly, however, rather than focusing on how management and organization theory might lead to a better understanding of religious organizations, Dyck focuses on how an analysis of the world’s largest religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam — can augment management theory. In other words, “management theory and practice are the dependent variables” (p. 5). Dyck concludes that his analysis of the “spiritual turn” has three main implications for management research. First, research on spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and mindfulness, is particularly valuable because it highlights the effects of these practices on the individuals who perform them. Specifically, such practices often stimulate individuals to act as agents of organizational and social change. Second, the spiritual turn may provide the basis of more radical, and indeed interesting, theories of management which moves beyond the basic assumptions that private organizations exist to maximize returns for shareholders. Finally, the spiritual turn suggests the need to develop a deeper and more fundamental understanding of ethical behavior.

Part II of this volume contains two articles that consider religion and organization at the micro-level. In the first of these, Gary Weaver and Jason Stansbury focus on the relationship between cognition and behavior. Their extensive and insightful review uses social identity theory and schematic social cognition as overarching frameworks to make sense of the study of religious behavior in organizations. As well as identifying a range of situational influences on the development of religious identities, schemas, and scripts, the authors identify five broad categories of influence on individual behavior in organizations where religion plays a key role: job attitudes, ethics, decision-making, emotions, and counterproductive behaviors. Weaver and Stansbury conclude by suggesting that, while their analysis is focused at the individual level, linking the micro-level factors identified in their review with social processes at other levels of analysis represents an important next step.

Douglas Creed, Rich DeJordy, and Jaco Lok also focus at the individual level, but take a very different tack from Weaver and Stansbury. Specifically, their article is concerned with how cultural resources that are embedded in religion help individuals who work in industrialized societies to narratively construct their sense of self. They focus specifically on the use of “redemptive self-narratives,” which both facilitate identity construction and provide the basis for action and decision making. To illustrate their arguments, the authors focus on the fascinating career narratives of a
retired Episcopal Bishop and a high profile CEO. While the authors are careful to point out that the availability of redemptive self-narratives do not in themselves enable agency of the sort exhibited by their two cases, they do provide a powerful basis for action. This is an absorbing article, one that shows the value of studying the intersection of religion and organization theory.

Part III of this volume contains two articles that focus on religious organizational forms and practices. C. R. Hinings and Mia Raynard focus on three fundamental questions. First, are religious organizations different from other kinds of organizations? Second, what factors lead to any differences and/or similarities? And third, are religious organizations different from each other? The authors conclude that religious organizations do indeed differ from other organizational forms because the former are rooted in belief systems that are theological. They also assert that there are substantive differences between different kinds of religious organizations because of variations in theological belief systems. Interestingly, however, Hinings and Raynard also point to similarities between religious and other types of organizations, and between different kinds of religious organizations: ultimately, they suggest, all organizations face pressures to adopt particular highly legitimate templates and practices. This article is invaluable in laying out the core mechanics underpinning religious organization, and pointing to core issues at the religion — organization theory interface that deserve greater attention.

Marvin Washington, Harry Van Buren III, and Karen Patterson focus on a particular organizational form — the megachurch — which they define as Protestant churches whose average attendance is more than 2,000 people. Drawing on a preliminary analysis of a database of more than 1,400 US megachurches, the authors identify some of the key characteristics of megachurch pastors, who the authors argue face the crucial task of balancing the competing demands of their denominations on the one hand and their local church members on the other. From this perspective, megachurch pastors are “institutional leaders” who sustain their churches through the telling of stories and more specifically the production of texts such as books. Focusing on 19 pastors who have written bestselling books, the authors make a series of intriguing points about the nature and purpose of these texts which sheds significant light on the megachurch as an organizational form.

In Part IV we have four articles that are connected in the sense that they use institutional theory to make their arguments, albeit in very different ways. Roger Friedland draws on Max Weber’s theory of value spheres to
present a “polytheistic sociology of religious life.” His article has three aims. The first is to outline Weber’s theory of value spheres, which Friedland views as a form of religious sociology. The second is to explain the role of “loving and loved divinity” in Weber’s value spheres. In doing so, Friedland highlights that from a Weberian perspective love is “an essential constituent of institution,” even in apparently rationalized domains such as mass politics. The final aim of the article is to articulate the implications of Weber’s thinking for the study of institutions. Friedland suggests that “the interlocked Weberian troika” of God, love and erotics opens up a range of new directions and possibilities for institutional theory. This is a fascinating (and unconventional) piece of work from the pioneer of what has arguably become institutional theory’s most influential concept: the institutional logic.

The article by Simona Giorgi, Margaret Guilder, and Jean Bartunek offers a very different take on institutional theory to Friedland, but one that is no less valuable or interesting. The authors are concerned with the following research question: “how do actors manage attempts at change projects by more powerful others within the same institution … when exit … or open opposition … are not considered viable options?” To answer this question they draw on a study of the 2008–2011 Apostolic Visitation of US women’s religious, which had its roots in concerns on the part of the Vatican that Catholic sisters had been unduly influenced by the relatively liberal attitudes and values of the society to which they belonged. The authors find that institutional resistance should not be viewed simply as a reaction to change, but rather as an active process that involves significant emotional and identity work. This article not only sheds light on the dynamics of religious organization, but also makes an important contribution to institutional theory, which has tended to underplay role of power and resistance.

Rich DeJordy, Brad Almond, Richard Nielson, and Douglas Creed use religious research universities as their empirical setting. Theoretically, the authors are concerned with how tensions between competing institutional logics can be managed. To explore this issue they present a stylized history of Baylor University. Their analysis shows how the University responded over time to the pressures exerted by multiple institutional logics. Importantly, they identify a novel way through which conflict between institutional logics can be resolved, one that differs from the kinds of resolution identified in the literature to date. Specifically, the authors suggest that the adoption of a superordinate logic through a dialectic process of conflict resolution has the potential to overcome tensions between logics
and at the same time produce transformational change. Like the previous contribution by Giorgi and colleagues, this is an important article not only because it sheds light on an organizational form that has received limited attention, but also because it offers new insights on a significant theoretical puzzle in the institutional literature.

The fourth article in the religion and institutional theory section is by Jared Peifer. As with DeJordy and colleagues, Peifer is concerned with how organizations respond to competing institutional logics. The empirical context that he uses to examine this issue is religious mutual funds (Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and nondenominational Protestant), which operate at the intersection of the logic of religion and the logic of finance. Using interviews with 31 employees (or “fund producers”) as well as a content analysis of material published by religious mutual funds, the author identifies two forms of symbolic boundary work — boundary blurring and boundary building — enacted by religious fund producers, and conceptuates the conditions under which institutional complexity is likely to endure. Interestingly, no significant differences in boundary work were identified between funds operated by different religious traditions. This research is particularly stimulating because of its explicit focus on the logic of religion, and because its analysis is comparative across different religions and denominations.

Part V of this volume is concerned with religion and social movements, and contains two captivating empirical articles. The article by Paolo Parigi examines how an organization was able to promote institutional change from a central field position by drawing on the legitimacy of local religious movements. The organization in question is the Catholic Church. The movements are the supporters of candidates to sainthood who used miracles to mobilize local communities. The institutional change is the move from early to modern sainthood. The period of study begins in the mid-sixteenth century and ends in the mid-seventeenth century, which captures the period of the aftermath of the Protestant schism. Drawing on Vatican archives of a special commission with responsibility for developing rules to adjudicate between miracles performed by candidates for sainthood, Parigi shows how the Commission was able to help heal the wounds within the Catholic Church by approving those miracles that forged ties between individuals spanning status and kinship boundaries.

Finally, the article by Dina Biscotti and Nicole Woolsey Biggart examines two organizations located at the intersection of the environmental and religious fields. The two organizations — Club EcoFaith and EcoFaith Federation — are conceptualized as institutional entrepreneurs that draw
on instrumental rather than substantive forms of rationality in an effort to embed environmentalism within the field of religion through efficiency programs. The authors find that Club Ecofaith and EcoFaith Federation face similar legitimacy challenges and deploy similar legitimating strategies to overcome them. Interestingly, both organizations sought to position practices designed to protect the environment as fundamentally religious, and indeed incorporated environmental consumption practices into their ministry. Their success has led secular environmental organizations to take note of their persuasive strategies. While Biscotti and Biggart’s context and timeframe are clearly very different to those of Parigi, their findings are no less compelling.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this introduction to the volume on religion and organization theory, we have sought to accomplish three goals. First, we have argued that OMT has much to gain from a more explicit engagement with the role of religion in organizations, and have sought to dispel concerns about the appropriateness of religion as a research topic. Second, we have pointed to some streams of research that we believe have particular potential for connecting religion and OMT and have suggested some possible topic areas. Finally, we have introduced the articles that make up this volume and have described the contribution of each of them. Combined, we believe that the articles that we have assembled constitute an important step toward a fuller engagement with religion on the part of organizational researchers.

NOTE

1. For example, more than 40% of the submissions to the Organization and Management Theory Division of the Academy of Management in 2013 were identified by the author(s) as institutional theory.

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