

Homo Religiosus at Work: On “Religiosity,” Ethics, and Management¹

Scientific Oration

Presented on November 24, 2015

School of Business and Management, ITB

By

Andika Putra Pratama, PhD

A growing management and organizational scholarship has called for a more meaningful and holistic way of studying religion and religiosity in the workplace (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Gundolf & Filser, 2013; King, 2008; Tracey, 2012; Weaver & Agle, 2002). Such urgency seems to be driven by the increasingly diverse workforce, in the West especially, thus the need to accommodate various forms of religiosity at work (Cash & Gray, 2000; King, 2008; Walker et al., 2012; Weaver & Agle, 2002). More fundamentally, studying religion and religiosity in the workplace is important because it has been argued to have a major impact on people’s behavior, including economic, organizational and moral behavior (e.g. Senger, 1970; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Weber, 1930/2005). In the context of Indonesia, studying religion or religiosity in the context of management is relevant given that 99% of Indonesian people regard “religion” as important to their life (Gallup, 2009).

As a complex phenomenon (see Atran & Norenzayan, 2004; Graham & Haidt, 2010; Saroglou, 2011), religion has been approached from a variety of angles and in various forms (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). Particularly in the management literature, religion has largely been discussed rather *prescriptively* (see Gundolf & Filser, 2013), providing a range of normative, theoretical, insights into how to conduct business or practice management from the *religious* points of view (e.g. Abeng, 1997; Ali et al., 2000; Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Kim et al., 2012; Vogel, 2001). Consequently, there is a need to empirically study religion in the context of management “in a more meaningful and determined way” (Tracey, 2012: 87). This includes the various ways in which religion

¹ The document contains information taken directly from the author’s dissertation, titled “Homo Religiosus at Work: An Exploration of How ‘Religiosity’ Relates to Ethics.” Certain adjustments are made, primarily for the purpose of the oration.

affects people's behavior at work, the *good* and the *bad* (Bloom, 2012; Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Mentzer, 2002). It has been found that while religious people tend to be virtuous, some also tend to feel more virtuous than others (i.e. religious pride). In addition, while religious individuals tend to be more prosocial, some also tend to exhibit egocentric tendencies, such as prejudiced attitudes and behaviors towards other groups (see Chan-Serafin et al., 2013).

In this oration, I intend to highlight the theoretical approach I have developed in my dissertation, along with some discoveries found. On the one hand, given the overwhelming number of works in the management literature that provide some sort of ethical guidelines (Gundolf & Filser, 2013), the relationship between religiosity and ethics seems clear. On the other hand, given the various standards with which we deal with religiosity and ethics, resulting in the difficulty to define each, we might expect the relationship between the two to be somewhat complex (Weaver & Agle, 2002) and potentially inconsistent (see Craft, 2013; Parboteeah et al., 2008). Before we begin, it is important for me to emphasize that the work that I do is not prescriptive or normative, rather descriptive. That is, I do not attempt to direct the audience's decision regarding ethics or religiosity or to provide a direction on what to do in your life. Rather, what I shall explain is expected to give insight into our decision-making or ethical decision-making process as a human being.

There is little consensus in defining religiosity or religiousness (e.g. Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). One reason may be disciplinary. The psychological literature generally treats religiosity (or religiousness) as an individual phenomenon (e.g. Hill et al., 2000), while the sociological literature treats religiosity as a social or group phenomenon. In addition, the social psychological approach regards religion/religiosity as an individual approach in relation to the social (Batson et al., 1993), including the cross-cultural psychological approach (e.g. Saroglou, 2011). Nevertheless, within the psychological study of religion itself, there is no consensus in how religiosity is defined (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). For organizational research, given its reliance on neighboring disciplines such as psychology and sociology (e.g. Porter, 1996), this has been a very tricky subject (e.g. Weaver & Agle, 2002). To further complicate matters, any scholarly

definition related to religiosity could potentially contradict “a given individual’s self-definition” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005: 37).

Historically, “religion” as a term has evolved from an internal experience of a person signifying personal piety to a rigid entity signifying a collective system of belief (Batson et al., 1993; Hill et al., 2000; Smith, 1962/1991) or culture (Geertz, 1973; Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). It is argued that the shift has been due to increasing contact among different so-called religious communities (Smith, 1962/1991). In the theoretical approach I use, I integrate the psychological notion of human beings as *homo religiosus* (DuBose, 2014b) and the sociological notion of the sacred (Durkheim, 1912/1965).

As *homo religiosus*, it has been thought that humans are inherently religious. But this does not refer to “a person’s creedal beliefs or institutional commitments per se,” but to “...our existential drive toward transcendence, freedom, and meaning-making, no matter the differences of religious or a/religious backgrounds or convictions” (p. 827). This may include an atheist (Batson et al., 1993). Everyone, regardless of whether or not the language of expressing transcendence involves what is called “God,” may have a drive towards transcendence. This need to transcend has been thought to be the highest of all human motivation (Maslow, 1971; Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

But human beings do not live in isolations. Here, a more sociological notion of the sacred is helpful. What is called “sacred” has arguably been central to any religious phenomena (Demerath, 1999; Durkheim, 1912/1965; Leuba, 1913). It is also central to various psychological definitions of religiosity (see Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). What is considered sacred, however, can be simply anything (Demerath, 1999; Durkheim, 1912/1965), beyond what is traditionally regarded as sacred (see Hill et al., 2000). Given the secularization of the society, especially in the West, it is argued that things that traditionally are not the concerns of “religion” as a system of belief have been adopted as sacred matters as well (Belk et al., 1989; Demerath, 1999), such as modern organizations (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). Generally speaking, things are sacred “when they come to us as the expression of powers superior to us and connected with us, when there are ways of ‘putting oneself right’ with these powers, and when failure to conform to these ways entails danger” (Leuba, 1913: 327). The sacred can thus be thought of as the “standard” with which one’s action is supposed to be in

accordance. What is called “God” can be considered sacred, which is embedded in some definitions of religiosity (e.g. McDaniel & Burnett, 1990). But the fact that people have different mental representations of God (Davis et al., 2013; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011), thus enabling them to accept or reject that representation (Armstrong, 1993), makes “God” as a term potentially a malleable concept.

In general, humans are born into a community or society where rules, norms, ideas or structures, including those related to morality, have been predefined. Communities, to a large extent, control the overall behaviors of their members, ensuring that they act as one moral collective (Durkheim, 1912/1965; Geertz, 1973; Graham & Haidt, 2010). They are usually known simply as “religions,” in which *the sacred* has or have been predefined (Leuba, 1913), no matter how rudimentary it is understood or how many manifestations there are. Religion is traditionally understood as any means of approaching what the “religious” community considers sacred (Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

But this idea of predefined rules or norms, which are subject to social construction overtime (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), should also apply to a secular collective like an organization (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). Every community has rules or codes of ethics, written or unwritten, about what is ought to be done and what is forbidden. These rules are made sacred or sacralized and bind its members, whether or not they are willing to conform (e.g. Warren, 2003). In other words, given that the sacred is or are defined or predefined (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002), all communities are essentially religious communities. As Durkheim (1912/1965) maintains, it is the sacred, whichever way it is defined (e.g. God, gods, objects, humans or kinds of ends), that constitutes a “religion.” This includes organizations as “secular religions” (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002).

Given this socially constructed nature of sacredness, human beings as *homo religiosus* face the potential tension between being religious as driving towards “transcendence, freedom, and meaning-making” (DuBose, 2014b) and being religious as what the community or communities consider(s) sacred. Communities act as a mechanism that sets the boundary conditions for people to behave. Individuals will then be predisposed to behave according to what they consider sacred. Overall, as *homo religiosus*, humans experience tensions with regard to what they consider sacred. To

some extent, such tensions may bring humans to sacralize something less fundamental than the universal, whatever it is. These tensions people experience contribute to sacralizing certain matters and desacralizing others while some may struggle to decide on what matters should be considered more sacred than others, things that would make them feel “safe.” Here, we can argue how being religious can potentially have good or bad behavioral consequences (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013).

Here, religiosity can be defined as *a psychological disposition of an individual emphasizing an inclination to act in accordance with what the individual considers sacred*. On the one hand, religious teachings and beliefs, within various traditions, are arguably sources of “good” values such as prosociality, virtuousness, and other basic moral values (e.g. Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008). Interestingly, atheistic values do also seem to converge on these basic moral values (Kinnier et al., 2000). What is more interesting is the assertion that individuals are biologically wired with these religious-moral values (Lawrence, 2004; Sadler-Smith, 2012). On the other hand, the existence of “religion,” or to a large extent community itself, seems to provide the basis for other self-serving motives (Allport & Ross, 1967; Bloom, 2012; Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010), or motives that enhance own positive self-image, with emphasis on “values” such as pride and egocentrism (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). To the extreme, it can be the kind of fundamentalist religiosity (or non-religiosity), in a traditional sense (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Bloom (2012) argues that the “bad” side of religiosity itself seems to be unrelated to religious belief, but to “religion,” as a social validator.

Overall, given the tensions that human beings as *homo religiosus* experience, there are potentially a variety of sacredness. In other words, one can be more or less religious in different ways. From my investigations, I have discovered three forms of sacredness: *materialism*, *traditional religion*, and *virtue*.

Materialism as sacred is characterized by a commitment to personal gains that involve materialistic matters such as “money,” “career,” and “social status.” Generally, these are not items usually associated with religiosity, rather with non-religiosity (or secularity, not irreligiosity). It speaks to Weber’s (1930) classic argument about a religious foundation of capitalistic spirit, which could arguably be associated with materialistic gains. That is,

people may be drawn to worldly success (i.e. materialistic gains) partly because they are religiously encouraged. As “religion” is said to encourage hard work (e.g. Parboteeah et al., 2009), the aim for materialistic gains as a consequence of hard work may be interpreted as religiously justified. That is, some people may find it religiously justifiable to aim for materialistic gains, likened to having power and socially desirable achievement, with people sacralizing materialism likely to be intrinsically religious as well or those living their religion. In one study, involving a diverse set of samples, people who sacralize materialism are also more likely to morally disengage. It means that they are more likely to have an inclination to behave unethically without feeling any guilt. Interestingly, in the same study, people who sacralize materialism are also those who are intrinsically religious. That is, people who live their religion tend to sacralize materialistic matters. In another study, using an adult sample, people who sacralize materialism also tend to behave unethically (i.e. lying). Further, across studies, those who sacralize materialism are also more likely to be those whose central value is self-enhancement, a value that emphasizes achievement and power (e.g. Schwartz, 1992, 1994) and that has been found to predict cheating behavior (Pulfrey & Butera, 2013) and destructive leadership decision (Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2008).

Traditional religion as sacred is characterized by a commitment to what has been traditionally associated with religion, such as “God” and “personal-religious growth.” It is interesting to note that sacralizing traditional religion appears to capture both adherence to religion (i.e. intrinsic religiosity) and questioning religion (i.e. quest), with a sense of transcendent self-identity (i.e. spirituality). This confirms the complexity of religious experience (e.g. Graham et al., 2008), unable to be captured by any one religious dimension. The implication of this is to avoid oversimplifying the notion of “religious people”. In other words, there appears to be no such thing as a religious person. In one study, those who sacralize traditional religion are also more likely to behave ethically (i.e. to volunteer).

Virtue as sacred is characterized by a commitment to virtues or moral values such as “empathy,” “compassion,” and “forgiving.” All of these are considered “sacred matters,” without which individuals would feel in danger. It has been studied and recorded that a group of universal values (e.g. transcendence, courage, humility, thankfulness,

temperance, benevolence) and their forms are espoused by all major religious teachings (e.g. Ali et al., 2000; Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Saroglou, 2011; Vogel, 2001). Interestingly, the universality also applies to philosophical and atheistic traditions (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Kinnier et al., 2000). As it is argued, the point of convergence is often times gone unnoticed simply because of the use of different linguistic expressions (Kriger & Seng, 2005). Those who sacralize virtue (or moral values) are more likely to be those whose values are self-transcendence, a value that emphasizes concerns for the wellbeing of others (Caprara et al., 2012). They are also more likely to be those who sacralize traditional religion. Nevertheless, even though the relationship between sacralizing traditional religion and sacralizing virtue is highly positive, they are not completely overlapping. These are two different forms of sacredness. Further, in one study, those who sacralize virtue are more likely to behave ethically (to volunteer). In another study, those who sacralize virtue are less likely to behave unethically.

The results related to the forms of sacredness may inform “religious” decision makers (i.e. individuals who perceive themselves as “religious”) working in particularly secular business organizations about the varieties or forms of sacredness and how they potentially operate in their decision-making, especially ethical decision-making. That is, while religious individuals may have their own convictions or ideas about their “religiosity,” they may want to take advantage from the discovery of materialism, traditional religion, and virtue as forms of sacredness by thinking about how they are embedded in their work and how they affect their work behaviors. They may reflect upon the extent to which the arguably materialistic tendencies of modern organizations, their religion, and their moral values affect their work behaviors.

In the future, scholars may want to use “religion” as a framework for thinking about organizations in general. This is explicit in the work of Ashforth & Vaidyanath (2002), viewing organizations as secular religions. It is curious to see how organizational practices, related to whatever it is people in organizations consider sacred, relate to business ethics. For example, how does an organizational goal play out as a sacred matter and how it impacts organizational lives? Therefore, as opposed to looking at “religion” in the traditional way of looking at it, limiting it to “Judaism,” “Christianity,” or “Islam,”

“religion” can be viewed more as a framework for thinking about organizations, thus contributing to organization theory. In addition, given that religion is argued to be a moral collective that binds individuals within (Durkheim, 1912/1965; Graham & Haidt, 2010), religion as a framework is expected to give much insight about the morality of organizational lives, thus potentially addressing the argument for the inherent evil of organizations (e.g. Darley, 1992; Linstead et al., 2014).

Further, scholars may want to explore the connection between sacredness that lies within the realm of the traditional “religions” and sacredness that is embedded within the realm of organizational lives and examine how organizational members rationalize the two forms of sacredness. This is particularly central to organizational lives in countries such as Indonesia, where 99% of the people consider “religion” to be central or important to their lives (Gallup, 2009). Do people find conflicting motives related to sacred matters created by these two forms of sacredness? If so, how do they rationalize or justify the conflicts? For example, in the case of Turkish business people, it is found that people sometimes have to sacrifice religious beliefs or practices when doing or practicing business (e.g. Uygur, 2009). Since people do live in complex societies, more examinations of the interplay between “traditional religion” and “secular religion” would enable us to better understand religion as a multifaceted phenomenon. In the cosmology of the West especially, the religious and the secular are very much distinguished. But it is not necessarily so in other countries (e.g. Davis & Robinson, 2006). In other words, “religion” is not necessarily viewed as a matter separate from other forms of life; it is the way to do life itself, however various it may behaviorally be enacted. Simply put, “doing” is in essence “religious,” for better or worse. But even in the West, many are said to struggle between the two worlds of the sacred/secular (e.g. Kim et al., 2012).

In summary, I have proposed to see religiosity not as an “entity” separate from the realm of work, rather as an integral aspect of human living and functioning. It is similar to other psychological dispositions such as values and something that human beings carry to all aspects of their lives, including organizational lives. Overall, in the sea of matters that can be regarded as more or less sacred, individuals struggle to behave in accordance with what they consider sacred, be it “God,” “money,” “social status” or “empathy.” As a final note, it is important to note that “the sacred” lives within human subconsciousness.

We do not necessarily regard things as “sacred,” in our linguistic expression, yet we may recognize the quality or essence of sacredness attached to them once it becomes apparent to us.

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Scientific Oration

Andika Putra Pratama, PhD

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On Religiosity, Ethics, and Management

November 24, 2015

SBM ITB, Bandung

The Field(s)

Behavioral Ethics

How people, individually and collectively, behave ethically and unethically

Organizational Behavior

How people, individually and collectively, behave at work

General Framework

