

Wenzel Matiaske, Gerd Grözinger\*

Introduction

## Religion and the Organization Man

Surprisingly, the increasing interest social sciences have shown in religion for some time – as indicated by the widely discussed volume of essays by Habermas (2008) – has almost entirely left out the issue of organization. This is because the rediscovery of the functionality of religious heritage, which modern societies cannot shed for the sake of their liberal, including the ensuing moral principles, should not only focus on the mundane need for orientation and sophisticated ways of articulating the assessment of individual life plans or of social pathologies at societal level. It is often assumed that the spread of core beliefs of naturalism, which is concomitant with scientific and technical progress on the one hand and globalization on the other, gives rise to religious needs. However, this is neither an altogether new phenomenon in modern age nor would it be permissible to ascertain a fundamentally changed structure of needs or a trend reversal at this level. When considering that secularization was accompanied by the modern world's state of being organized, the rather remarkable thing is the new demand for normative orientation, phrased in moral terminology as a result of the “need” of organizations as corporate players.

This is despite the fact that organizations are considered a neutral sphere: Just as modern organizations, being systems, show ignorance about their objectives, the member of the organization sheds his/her religious ideas upon passing through the “factory gate” – or at least outside the organization. However, from the point of view of organizational theory, organizations encounter three fundamental problems, which have always invited ethical solutions and thus solutions founded on religion. In the first place, the establishment of organizations as corporate players calls for the development of decision rules on collective issues as well as norms for dividing possible gains and losses (Coleman 1974). Secondly, organizations do not only require material resources from their social environment but also symbolic or legitimizing ones (Meyer/Rowan 1977). Finally, in order to survive in the long term, organizations depend on voluntary contributions of their members, over and beyond the output to which they are formally entitled (Barnard 1938). Thus, the “iron cage” of bureaucratic organization was not only “as hard as steel” in the sense of external, but also internal constraints or, put differently, the *Berufsmensch* (someone whose identity is rooted in work), also wanted – and not only “ought” – to be like that (Weber 1920/2002). This

---

\* Prof. Dr. Wenzel Matiaske, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Helmut-Schmidt-University Hamburg, and German Socio-Economic Panel Study, German Institute of Economic Research (DIW/SOEP) Berlin. E-mail: matiaske@hsu-hh.de.

Prof. Dr. Gerd Grözinger, International Institute for Management, University of Flensburg. E-mail: groezing@uni-flensburg.de.

implies that modern organization was able to derive various benefits from the pre-modern religious heritage.

The close links between organization and religion may have multiplied in the present time: So, for instance, compared with some decades ago, globalization did not only entail a greater ethnic diversity of organizations, but also a greater religious diversity. In addition, the “organizational citizen” is becoming increasingly female, and women are known to be more religious than men (Stark 2002). Finally, contemporary organizations no longer face only the social issue but a multitude of ethical problems concerning the community: At different levels, organizations are calling for normative standards, such as secondary virtues of the good organizational citizen at the individual level or accountability standards at the collective level. These are just some of the reasons for taking a closer look at the relationship between organization and religion, which was the subject of the 2009 workshop of the “Management Revue” journal held at the Inter-University Center Dubrovnik. The present issue of the journal contains some of the contributions to the seminar, as well as additional material.

On the basis of the Aristotelian concept of justice and the reception of the latter by the scholastic doctrine of the just price, *Christian Hecker* and *Hans G. Nutzinger* discuss the relationship between economy and justice. They point out that distributive and redistributive justice were replaced by the concepts of increase in prosperity and efficiency when modern economics became established as a science. Starting from the difference between Anglo-American neoliberalism and German ordoliberalism, the authors develop ways of integrating aspects of justice into economic theory, something they deem advisable in view of the acceptance of recommendations of economic policy, but also in view of the fact that – in theoretical terms – the distinction between efficiency aspects and distribution aspects cannot be extended to more complex common properties.

*Emil Inauen, Katja Rost, Margit Osterloh* and *Bruno S. Frey* have analyzed the organization of Benedictine monasteries in order to investigate “good governance”. This is because monasteries, owing to their economic success, served as an example to commercial enterprises on the one hand while, on the other hand, they had to establish mechanisms for protecting the organization, since the temptation to make improper use of their success was inherent in their achievements. With reference to the current economic crisis, the authors make the point that contemporary organizations – with their unilateral emphasis on financial incentives – may have developed wrong mechanisms for protecting themselves (and their stakeholders) against exploitation. They conclude that internalized value orientations, broad participation rights and co-determination but also specific external control mechanisms can be adapted by the Benedictines in order to establish more efficient governance mechanisms.

However, the study by *Claudia Groß* warns against the misuse of religious feelings for the purpose of commercial organizations. On the one hand, her case study, which cites the example of “*Amway*”, demonstrates impressively how enterprises can misuse the religious feelings of employees to achieve the commercial objectives of the organization. On the other hand, the empirical material of this paper illustrates that actions an observer would classify as exploitation do not necessarily have to be perceived as such. While the role of the member of the ordinary bureaucratic organization allows

for a role distancing as a result of partial inclusion, role distance in the case being discussed calls for leaving the “church” of the organization.

*Rainer Kreuzhof* and *Wolfgang Ockenfels* discuss the basic assumptions of a Christian business ethics or, more precisely, Christian ethics of economic action and the economic system. Choosing Habermas' concept of a post-secular society as a starting point, the authors elaborate on the essentials of a Christian economic ethics. According to the Catholic social doctrine *fides et ratio*, faith and reason are identified as sources of such ethics. Furthermore, the authors show that the foundations of the German concept of social market economy match these principles in general, and they discuss whether this concept could be generalized and applied to global economy.

William Whyte's term “Organization Man”, quoted in the title of this Special Issue, has something of a mocking intention in it that treats the matter ironically. *Dallas Hanson* and *Wayne O'Donohue* have pointed this out in their essay on Whyte's classic work. They explain that Whyte – just like other sociologists of his time (David Riesman, C. Wright Mills, but also Herbert Marcuse) – worried about what he regarded as an emerging collectivism and the one-dimensionality of life in the “iron cage” on the one hand, while, on the other, being unable to conceive of a more efficient antidote to the inevitable triumph of large-scale organizations than analysis and polemics. *Dallas Hanson* and *Wayne O'Donohue* show that Whyte's fear of the predominance of the concrete organization over the individual has lost its explanatory power today. Furthermore, according to the authors, it is technologies and management techniques that have produced the state of being organized and a new type of the “Organization Man” in the global economy.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the authors for their contributions, to the participants in the seminar for providing interesting discussions, and to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for the support rendered to the seminar at the Dubrovnik Inter-University Center.

## References

- Barnard, Chester I. (1938): *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Coleman, James S. (1974): *Power and the Structure of Society*. New York, London: Norton.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2008): *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. New York: Wiley.
- Meyer, John W. / Rowan, Brian (1977): Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. In: *American Journal of Sociology*, 83:340-363.
- Stark, Rodney (2002): Physiology and Faith: Addressing the “Universal” Gender Difference in Religious Commitment. In: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41: 495-507.
- Weber, Max (1920/2002): *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Penguin.
- Whyte, William H. (1956/1960): *The Organization Man*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.