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ORGANIZATIONAL FORM, STRUCTURE, AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose − *This article reviews the historical development of the treatment of religious organizations in journals centered on religion.*

Design/methodology/approach − *The article asks four questions: (1) Are religious organizations different from other kinds of organizations? (2) What factors produce differences or similarities between religious and other organizations? (3) Are religious organizations different from each other?*

Findings − *Differences from other kinds of organizations are based in beliefs/theology. But there is a constant concern with the bureaucratization of religious organizations as they are subject to general organizational influences such as scale and geographical dispersion. However, it is argued that these general influences emanate from belief systems. We suggest the need for a renewed attention to a comparative organizations perspective in organization theory − one that appreciates the similarities and differences* between *sectors and* within *sectors.*

Originality/value − *Not only are there differences between religious and nonreligious organizations, but there are also substantial differences between religious organizations. There are also similarities between religious and nonreligious organizations, as well as similarities between religious organizations. The way forward for both the study of religious organizations and organizational theory in general is to look for explanations for these similarities and differences.*

Keywords: Religion; organizational form; comparative organizations; bureaucracy; beliefs

In a recent survey entitled "Religion and organization: A critical review of current trends and future directions," Paul Tracey (2012) remarked that "it is surprising that organization theorists have not explored the intersection between religion and organization in a more meaningful and determined way." While he does not directly mention organizational forms and structures within religion as an area, he does say that religion "has such richness and diversity of organizational forms" (Tracey, 2012, p. 33) and particularly draws attention to issues of organizational control. It is our aim in this article to examine issues of organizational form and structure in religious organizations by reviewing the historical development of the field and suggesting how this is a fruitful area of research.

Within the sociology of religion there has been considerable concern with religious organizations, partially through the lens of church-sect theory which has a long history (Troeltsch 1931/1911; Weber, 1958/1904; Wilson, 1959, 1970). We examine church-sect theory to a limited extent, because it is a foundational perspective within the sociology of religion. While it is essentially a theory of religious development and change, much of its content is about changes in organizational forms. Thus, we take account of what organizational theorizing has been carried out from a church-sect theory approach. Of course, there have also been studies of structural arrangements in religious organizations, outside the church-sect framing (Chaves, 1993a; Dyck, Starke, Harder, & Hecht, 2005; Hinings & Bryman, 1974; Hinings & Foster, 1973), as well as work on organizational development and change (Osborne, 1968; Schoenherr, Lawrence, & Vilarino, 1988; Woodrum, 1982), and power, authority, and decision making (Bartholomew, 1981; Chaves, 1993b; Nelson & Hiller, 1981).

Our interest in religious organizational forms derives from a concern with an empirical setting where potential tensions are particularly acute.

On the one hand, it has been suggested that religious organizations experience similar pressures to organizations located in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, and, on the other hand, that they are organizations where belief systems are primary. There are a number of tensions inherent in religious organizations. One is that between the religious-oriented goals and activities focused on the sacred, and economically driven activities of managing a diverse range of staff of pastors, counselors, musicians, administrators, and volunteers. On the one hand, religious organizations experience similar pressures to organizations located in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, such as arise from scale, resource flows, a volunteer base; and, on the other hand, they differ because of the primacy of belief systems which present an alternative set of pressures, especially in working out the relationship between beliefs, organization, and activities.

There is also the tension of secularization, the debate that religious organizations have lost their status and authority in society, yet there are rapidly growing religious movements and consultants and programs on church growth. The sociology of religion has long debated the meaning of secularization (Abbott, 1988; Martin, 2005; Warner, 2010) and with it, the changing meaning of the sacred. For example, with regard to the latter, Zelizer (1989) examines the changing social meaning and structure of domestic money. She explores the limits of "purely utilitarian conceptions of market money" by identifying the extra-economic and social bases of modern money. In doing this she points to the social construction of the sacred and the profane in economic relationships. Of course, Douglas (2005) has shown how the line between the sacred and the secular is one that moves as societies change and the nature of cosmologies change.

As a result of these issues and themes, there are three questions that we address in the article:

1. Are religious organizations different from other kinds of organizations?
2. What factors produce differences or similarities between religious and other organizations?
3. Are religious organizations different from each other?

There is a very strong historical dimension to the study of religious organizations. The secularization debate itself is one about the history of religion within society. As a result, we reviewed the historical development of the treatment of religious organizations — focusing in particular, on articles relating to structural arrangements in religious organizations. We found 37 articles in journals concerned with religion (e.g., *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Review of Religious Research, Social Compass, Sociology*

of Religion) and 29 papers in sociology and political science journals (e.g., *Sociological Analysis, Social Forces, American Journal of Sociology*). While these may not be journals to which organization scholars regularly refer, they contain considerable material on the organization of churches, social movements and the impact of religion on work, amongst other things.

We outline the general themes that have emerged in the sociology of religion over the past decades to shed light on how the issue of organizational forms has been treated, particularly by tracking developments over time, from the 1960s forward. We delve deeper into the tensions that characterize many religious organizations, and their implications for organizational structure and forms. In doing this we take account of the fact that there are aspects that are unique to faith-based organizations and aspects that are common to all organizations. Finally, we discuss how further examination of organizational forms in religious organizations can provide a fruitful avenue for future research.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES IN RELIGION

There are two debates that have taken place concerning the structures and forms of religious organizations. One is distinctly typological (Meyer, Tsui, & Hinings, 1993), furthered through work on church-sect theory (Dawson, 2011; Wilson, 1970). The other concerns the potentially distinctive nature of religious organizations as they relate to the broader institutional environment. This debate is centered on the organizational components of religious organizations and the extent to which they are subject to the same pressures as nonreligious organizations. Hinings and Foster (1973) developed a contingency based organizational theory for churches which explicitly gives the beliefs and values of religious organizations a pre-eminent place in the causality of their model (see their Figure 3, p. 102). This argument is that the theological position of a religious organization on such aspects as the role of the priest, the emphasis, or lack of it, on engaging with social issues in the modern world, and the precepts on the distinctive nature of religious organizations would all have a first-order, primary impact on organization structure and systems. Also, the volunteer base of religious organizations has an impact on the kinds of resources at their disposal and their availability. This argument is essentially an institutional one, arguing for particular "institutionalized templates" for religious organizations with values and meanings at the center. That is, religious

organizations are inherently different from other organizations. Religious beliefs generate distinctive structures compared to those of nonreligious organizations.

Interestingly, Beckford (1985), taking up the theme of secularization, argues that it has "simultaneously eroded the distinctiveness of religious organizations *and* of the sociological understanding of them" (p. 126). He goes on to argue that there is "a declining sense of the distinctiveness of religious organizations as social phenomenon. They are treated little differently from other kinds of organization; and they are expected to perform like other organizations. In other words, the boundary between the sacred and the secular has been affected in fact as well as in method" (p. 133). In the historical development of the sociology of religion, the notion of organization was seen as being in opposition to the sacred nature of religion. Now these two categories are no longer thought to be opposed.

In essence, Hinings and Foster (1973) and Beckford (1985) represent different, yet potentially convergent thoughts about religious organizations. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on the inherent distinctiveness of religious organizations and the ways in which they can serve as an important test bed for more general organization theories. On the other, there is the suggestion that religious organizations have become more like "regular" organizations with their distinctiveness eroding. The convergence between these two perspectives occurs when we turn this into a research question, asking "what are the differences and similarities between religious organizations" and add, "why do such differences and similarities occur?" This is echoed in DiMaggio's (1998, p. 7) statement: "because much religious activity is institutionalized and carried out through formal organizations (e.g., churches, religiously affiliated charities, religious presses, and broadcasters), students of religion may have something to learn from the experience of their colleagues in the organizations field. Because the world of religious organizations is so diverse and because many religious organizations pursue goals and employ structures quite unlike those of the firms, service organizations, and public agencies on which most organizational research has focused, it is equally likely that organizational behaviorists have much to learn from students of organized religion."

There are suggestions that the sacred−secular divide stunts the growth of both organizational theory and the study of religion (Demerath III, Hall, Schmitt, & Williams, 1998; Demerath & Schmitt, 1998) and that there is a need for more cross-fertilization between secular organizational analysis and religious scholarship. Thus, "the arena of religious organizations is rich with distinctive organizational designs, special interorganizational

relationships, and a large presence across the landscape of society. The field of complex organizations would be well advised to treat religious institutions more seriously, and scholars of religion would do well to study the emerging scholarship on organizations of all sorts" (Demerath & Schmitt, 1998, p. 396). To do that, successfully and systematically, organizational theorists need to have a better understanding of what issues and topics have been raised, researched, and discussed in studies of religious organizations.

RELIGION AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS AND STRUCTURES

There has been a concern with elaborating typologies of religious organizations (e.g., Francis, 1950; Hillery, 1969; Scherer, 1988; Welch, 1977). While it has been much criticized, much of the writing about organizational forms in religion derives from church-sect theory − either directly or indirectly through the use of some of the categories or concepts related to it. Church-sect theory is actually a dynamic theory of organizational development and change and it uses this dual typology of organizational forms to summarize those changes. Two characteristics that distinguish churches from sects are that churches are bureaucratic and hierarchical (Dawson, 2011); and that their leaders typically have formal qualifications and experience (Ranson, Bryman, & Hinings, 1977). Sects, conversely, lean more heavily on charisma and informality. In addition, churches develop rituals and dogmatic statements of belief; whereas sects retain some degree of spontaneity. Much of the point-counterpoint of the church-sect distinction is about bureaucracy: "Churches develop routines and procedures … specialist qualified ministry with clearly delineated areas of authority. Thus, we have the hierarchy, differentiation and specification typical of bureaucratic organizations" (Hinings & Foster, 1973, p. 97). We can see these themes of bureaucratization and professionalization worked out in the literature of the 1960s and 1970s.

Bureaucratization and Professionalization

In a seminal article, O'Dea (1961) suggested that religious movements start in charismatic moments and, over time, become institutionalized

through bureaucratization because of five dilemmas that they face, namely, mixed motivation, objectification versus alienation, administrative order, delimitation, and power. The dilemmas of administrative order, delimitation, and power have very clear organizational referents. *Administrative order* is concerned with the requirements of large-scale management of churches. Increasing scale in a church leads to a greater administrative component (Hinings & Bryman, 1974). *Delimitation* is the translation of religious, supernatural messages into terms that relate to everyday events, a process of concretization that leads to the routinization of charisma. The dilemma of *power* deals with the extent to which voluntary adherence to a doctrine is substituted by institutionalized adherence. Thus, it has been suggested that there is continuous movement from relatively simple structures with strong charismatic elements to more complex organizational and bureaucratic structures (cf. Mintzberg, 1979). An important element in Western Christianity is the formalized and routinized administration of the means of grace, that is, the relationship between a believer and a divine being.

Much of this work has emphasized the bureaucratic form of religious organizations. In his study of the American Baptist Convention, Harrison (1959, p. x) argued that "modern social organization, especially in its Western manifestations, has taken the form of the bureaucratic structure. This is true of the church as well as the state and the business organization; it is as true of the denominations with a democratic church-order as it is of the ecclesiastical hierarchy." Similarly, the emergence and rapid growth of the early Methodist church was posited as due to the routinization of charisma and subsequent bureaucratization (Allen, 1962). At the same time, churches were influenced by societal models of bureaucracy and management that were part of general organizational development (Weber, 1949). For example, the organizational response of the Church of England to social change was influenced by the links between church and state and the organizational ideas of divergent theological schools within the church (Thompson, 1970).

The idea of a strong relationship between ecclesiastical development and bureaucratic forms has been widely accepted, but a further dimension in organizational development is professionalization (Fichter, 1961; Struzzo, 1970). While agreeing that leadership in religious groups face the same issues of management and administration as nonecclesiastical organizations, Fichter (1961) drew on a distinction between professional and bureaucratic modes of adaptation. It was suggested that the Roman Catholic Church faced issues of bureaucratic adaptation because of the

increasing professionalization of priests (Struzzo, 1970). A study of religious functionaries also showed that Roman Catholic priests saw themselves as operating in a bureaucratic environment. The Catholic episcopal system is a hierarchical and centralized one. Anglican clergy and Methodist ministers perceived less bureaucracy (Ranson et al., 1977) Thus, churches differ from each other because of their governance structure and the degree of professionalization of religious functionaries, but they are also generally subject to processes of bureaucratization.

Uniqueness and Difference

What this literature of 30−50 years ago shows is a concern with issues that are central to both organization theory and the sociology of religion (as both Demerath et al., 1998 and DiMaggio, 1998 point out). On the one hand, there is the suggestion that there are certain societal processes at work that push all organizations toward similar organizational forms and processes, such as bureaucratization and professionalization. This is, of course, the stuff of early neo-institutional theory (cf. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). On the other hand, there is the argument that religious organizations have unique characteristics, such as a belief-based purpose and a voluntary membership which means either that they develop completely different organizational forms or, that they react to overall societal pressures in ways that are dissimilar from other kinds of organizations. There is a contingency theory argument here (cf. Donaldson, 2001) as well as an institutional one. Religious organizations are subject to the pressures of scale, complexity, markets, resource flows, environmental uncertainty as contingency theory would argue. But they are also meaning-based organizations. Friedland and Alford (1991) define religion as one of the basic institutional orders of society. It is precisely this relationship between the "uniqueness" of religious organizations and the generalizing nature of organization theory that is seen by Tracey (2012), Demerath and Schmitt (1998), and DiMaggio (1998) as fertile ground for further development.

This issue of the uniqueness of a particular set of organizations, in this case, religious organizations, and the generalizing nature of organization theory is a critical one (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2009). McKelvey and Aldrich (1983) took organization theory to task for treating all organizations as alike. Aldrich (2009, p. 23) says, "today we might characterize this 'organizations are all alike' approach as one of extreme decontextualization." Thus, we are suggesting that researching religious organizations is

particularly fertile ground for the comparative analysis of organizations because, *prima facie*, one would expect differences between religious and nonreligious organizations.

There is also the rather less explored issue of sameness/uniqueness within religious organizations as a group. This latter notion is already present in church-sect theory, and in differences between, for example, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions within Christianity, as well as differences between the major world religions of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. In examining this issue of inter-religious organizational differences, there are two avenues to be traversed. One is concerned with elaborating the elements of organizational form, such as authority, governance, formalization, etc. to see what differences occur. The other avenue deals with the characteristics of religious organizations that influence different organizational forms, some of which are generic (e.g., size), and others of which are specific (e.g., theologies).

THE UNIQUENESS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS?

Tracey's (2012) analysis of 85 papers that involve religion, published in 21 different management journals (with only 29 published in the "top" *Financial Times* journals) shows that very few of them are concerned with organizational form (which is a major reason why we examined nonmanagement journals). The most common topics are religion and the environment, religion, and individual behavior, and workplace spirituality. In journals that are focused on religion, there has been a much greater concern with the organization of religious bodies and the impact of social environments on religious organizations. These have been continuing themes from the 1970s until today. In particular, sociologists of religion have been concerned with the extent to which religious organizations are subject to the same social processes as all organizations, for example, bureaucratization and professionalization, or whether they represent a distinct class of organizational forms because of their anchoring in beliefs and values. Indeed, Etzioni (1961) in his classic work on organizations, classified religious organizations as normative organizations (and added that normative control usually requires higher levels of commitment from members). They use symbolic rather than physical or material means of control and members must be committed to the inherent "rightness" of the authority system.

For many years, discussions of religious organizational forms have been seen in terms of the relationship and tensions between bureaucratization, professionalization, secularization, and integration (Benson & Dorsett, 1973; Brannon, 1971; Dann, 1976; Welch, 1977). Bureaucratization is about the development of a division of labor, hierarchy, rules, and career orientation. Professionalization emphasizes appropriate educational preparation and a vocational commitment. Secularization refers to the range of "activity spheres" in which the organization operates. And integration is the extent to which formal membership criteria become less important, removing barriers to participation. In line with similar debates in organizational theory, bureaucratic structures are seen as incompatible with the other three dimensions, yet there are pressures for all four to occur (Abbott, 1988; Scott, 1967). The argument of incompatibilities and tensions is an important one for understanding religious organizations. As so much of the literature suggests, these tensions derive from the normative and belief-centered nature of religious organizations, on the one hand, and the pressures they face from the institutional, economic, and social pressures from the societies in which they are located.

Authority and Decision Making

The question of similarity or difference has been characterized as, "associations between the way various groups confessionally conceived of the Ultimate and the way these groups chose to organize and conduct themselves" (Sommerfeld, 1968, p. 178). Immediately this points to a very special characteristic of religious groups, as compared to nonreligious organizations − that is, the conceptualization of a sacred other, to whom earthly followers relate. Indeed, the issue of how one accesses God, the Ultimate, the Sacred, is a central theme for religious organizations that, it is hypothesized, has strong effects on organization. Of course, this is a language which is quite foreign to organizational theorists, although it can, perhaps, be generically captured under notions of vision and beliefs. But talking about the vision and mission of a nonreligious organization is somewhat different from the idea of a god, or sacred being (together with ancient texts) being the source of authority and of organizational forms.

Central to all the debates about beliefs and organization is that of authority. This issue of the relationship of authority to beliefs, about access to a deity, has been explored by a number of writers. Indeed, it has been suggested that, "the starting point is the claim that at the heart of

religious organization is *not* religion, but religious authority" (Chaves, 1993a, p. 148). In comparison between Roman Catholic dioceses and union locals, Leagues of Women Voters, and stations of a delivery company, the Roman Catholic dioceses were the most centralized (Szafran, 1976). The Roman Catholic dioceses had a centralized authority system which interestingly, priests saw as both the actual and ideal situation for all dioceses, because it was a true reflection of the belief in the theological rightness of an ecclesial, hierarchical organization. Here we see a clear difference between religious and nonreligious organizations through direct comparative work.

A further important element emphasizing the differences between religious and nonreligious organizations is the role of the priesthood and the religious hierarchy in mediating the relationship between adherents and God. Because authority emanates from a divine being or beings, those who administer the relationship between that being and the "nonreligious" have a particular authority. This is rather different than authority coming from shareholders or a board. Dyck and Wiebe (2012) have developed this idea in the more overarching notion of salvation and its relationship to organizational practices. In their five phase model on the meaning of salvation over time, in phase 5 they give a special place to religious leaders who interpret, codify, and integrate teachings. They also suggest that dysfunctions may occur due to "coopting between the religious elite and the economic/ political elite" (Dyck & Wiebe, 2012, p. 305). There is a very special place in the organization for the religious leader unlike that of CEOs and vice-presidents in nonreligious organizations.

The argument for the uniqueness of religious organizations also relates to decision making as an aspect of authority, again, because of the impact of their normative basis. Decision making is to be made, "in conformity to principles of scripture and on the basis of divine guidance" (Nelson & Hiller, 1981, p. 174). For religious organizations, authority is a theological concept and religious groups are often quite deliberate in their articulations about it. Religion asserts that the basis of authority is external to the social order and as such, is antithetical to Weberian rational-legal authority; and conversely, much more consonant with either charismatic or traditional authority structures (Bartholomew, 1981). Yet, the organization structure of denominations is bureaucratic. The argument about bureaucracy is essentially an institutional one — given that "[t]he people who serve in them and interact with them bring assumptions from the wider society that religious organizations can be understood in bureaucratic terms" (Bartholomew, 1981, p. 129). Thus, we see the impact of societal values

and institutional templates on religious organizations and subsequent organizational tensions. The starting point is distinctiveness but the arrival point is that the pressures on religious organizations are similar to those on other kinds of organizations, but the outcome may well be distinctive because of balancing the sacred and the secular.

However, it can be argued that religious organizations have more than one authority structure and, following Stinchcombe (1990) that the proper unit of analysis is the organizational subunit. There are parallel structures in denominations (Chaves, 1993a). At the heart of most denominations is the congregation, the local unit which has varying degrees of autonomy. One structure is that of *religious authority* which is internally focused on controlling access to desired ends such as God and the sacraments, the key role of a religious functionary (Ranson et al., 1977). The other structure is that of *agency*, where there is engagement with activities such as missions, Christian education, financing building projects, etc. In this structure the congregation represents a place of resources as these are functions that are derived from the belief system but do not involve mediation between the individual member and a sacred being. In many religious organizations, the full-time religious functionary has no training and no interest in dealing with these activities. Thus, there is an important horizontal aspect to organizational authority in terms of the relationships between these two structures, and the agency component requires much more study. This two-structure approach highlights a tension between a distinctive sacramental focus and a set of activities (businesses?) which require a more general secular and managerial focus. It suggests that religious organizations may "manage" the tensions between belief-led structures and societal-pressured structures by keeping them separate.

This argument can be taken a step further with the idea of internal secularization, which is centered on the declining scope of religious authority (Chaves, 1993b). The agency structure, in effect, becomes an agent of internal secularization, decreasing the influence of religious authority and conforming more strongly to the pressures of societal organization. As a result, control changes; there is a *horizontal* rather than a *vertical* shift. Historically, discussions of authority and structure have emphasized notions of hierarchy and intercessionary structures with differences occurring in the nature of that hierarchical intermediate structure. With parallel structures, the differences concern the existence of other, horizontal areas of activity. These parallel structures produce organizational conflict and the outcomes will be influenced by the access that the competing elites, heading each of the paralleled structures, have to centralized resources.

An important insight here, especially in relation to discussions of secularization, is that religious authority is declining *even within religious organizations*. It is denominations with a decentralized, more autonomous organizational form that have resisted the control shift to agency structures. The rise of consultants and schema on church growth, visioning, and marketing are examples of this (e.g., Barna, 2009; Schwarz, 1995).

The attention to authority is central in the conceptualization of religious organizations because it is a theological as well as an organizational concept. From a theological point of view, the importance of authority derives from beliefs about the relationship of members to the Divine − in particular, whether it is direct or through intermediaries. From an organizational point of view, the importance of authority derives, initially, from Weberian distinctions between rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic sources and forms, such as bureaucracy, and then moves to issues of power and control.

Bureaucratization and Complexity

But there has also been a concern with aspects of organizational form other than authority in religious organizations that, *inter alia*, examines the impact of religious beliefs, the voluntary nature of these organizations, and the general impact of bureaucracy on form. An important element in the discussion of bureaucracy throughout the 1960s and 1970s was the development of administrative specialists, something that points to Chaves (1993a) later idea of an agency structure. In a study of specialist personnel whose responsibilities were to support the main operations of organizations, growth of this component in churches was not purely a function of size, but was rather mediated by the commitment of denominations to wide or complete geographical coverage (Hinings & Bryman, 1974). This commitment to widespread coverage is fundamentally tied to the beliefs and goals of churches, together with their voluntary base. Historically, the major, mainline denominations have embraced some version of complete geographical distribution, whereas more recent (i.e., the last 50 years) religious organizations have not followed that path. Spatial distribution is, for many religious organizations, no longer something that is seen as theologically relevant.

There is an issue here about the impact of scale and social pressures; in the USA, for example, religious organizations are among the largest and most extensive, and this is true for many countries. But while they have

national scale, they operate through a large number of local units, that is, congregations. In spite of the existence of national hierarchies and formal statements of belief, "local congregations conform to the norms values and practices of the local secular community frequently in contradiction to norms set by the hierarchy" (Brannon, 1971, p. 27). They have insecure leaders who are rewarded for keeping their congregations satisfied. To that end, there is almost complete dependence on voluntary members for resources, both in terms of people and finance, to carry out tasks. As a result, national hierarchies have little basis for influencing the policies and practices of locally oriented and entrenched congregations. This suggests that these local bodies are more heavily subjected to the norms of their local social systems rather than those of their national bodies.

Thus, religious organizations are not the uniform structures that they have usually been portrayed as (Dann, 1976). For example, while Weber saw the Catholic Church as an *archetypal* bureaucratic form, the changes that have occurred in the last century − in particular the reforms of Vatican II − have produced a much more differentiated structure. Decentralization, the emergence of a greater range of interest groups, and a greater degree of conflict, are but a few of the changes that have occurred in the last century. These changes underscore the need to see religious organizations as continually evolving − not only undergoing change, but becoming less stable in an organizational sense. This reinforces notions of parallel structures (Chaves, 1993a).

Most of the work on religious organizations has examined churches and denominations that have relatively long histories. From this can come historic, taken-for-granted practices of church governance (Mutch, 2009). Historically this can produce a "culture of organization" as Mutch (2009) argues is true for Presbyterian congregations. He argues that this culture of organization was marked by a common focus on system, accountability, and recording and as such helped to produce many modern management practices. The institutional argument is twofold; first, existing practices are historically derived and taken-for-granted and, second, that these religious practices may become templates for nonreligious organizations.

There are a number of interesting ideas that derive from these analyses. One is that church organizational forms are intimately connected to theological beliefs; the idea of organizational form is a theological concept (Dyck, Starke, Harder, & Hecht, 2005). Another is that, while belief is of prime importance, religious organizational forms are also related to their social and cultural context. The focus on *practices* of religious governance is

important. This suggests two things: first, that there is a specific and distinct aspect to religious organization; and second, that the relationship between religious organizations and the wider society can be the source of templates for nonreligious organizations. This may, of course, point to a time when the connections between religion and business were much closer than they are today. Historically, as one of the main institutional orders of society (Friedland & Alford, 1991), religion has impacted many organizational forms. With increasing secularization not only does the impact of religion on society decline, but the impact of societal norms and practices on religious organizations increases.

Much of the theorizing about religious organizations is that as they grow and mature they become more bureaucratic, a standard argument in contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001). But it has been suggested that there are religious organizations that resist the push to bureaucratization (Lindsay, 2010; Packard, 2011). In studying a religious organization called The Fellowship, Lindsay proposes the idea of *organizational liminality*, to describe organizations that combine institutional and anti-institutional elements. Liminality is an intentional strategy. What is interesting here is that the organization described is not a sect, denomination, or church, but a prayer fellowship for elites. It is more like a parallel structure rather than a structure of religious authority (Chaves, 1993a). As such it represents a type of religious organization that is not uncommon, but which has not been studied. There are a range of organizations within the sphere of religion that do not fit what have been the traditional distinctions used to study such organizations, for example, sect, denomination, ecclesia, independent church. It points to even greater differentiation between religious organizations.

Another "nonorganization," a religious social movement known as the Emerging Church is one that has increasingly questioned and scrutinized traditional religious authority, as institutionalized in the bureaucratic, corporate form (Packard, 2011). The Emerging Church movement has consciously attempted to eliminate such forms. It has become a home for the "dechurched" constituting a loosely coupled movement with no formal leadership, vision, or mission. In this "organization," there is an inverted labor structure with typically prestigious positions being part-time and unspecialized positions being full time. Experience is regarded as more important than education and credentials. And the idea of a calling, so central to religious functionaries, is seen as being *to* a group or cause rather than *by* an organization. The aim, in other words, is to avoid routinization and a church-like organizational structure. As such, it is also attempting to

come to terms with processes of secularization by making religion appealing to those with no experience of organized religion.

These kinds of concepts and studies point to an area of religious life that has been little studied, those social movements and organizations that exist outside formally designated churches. Yet, throughout the history of religion there have been many of these. Within Christianity, for example, the movement to abolish slavery, the China Inland Mission, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, Messy Church, Red Letter Christians, and so on. They are likely to be a particularly fruitful area of study for understanding issues of organizational growth and change and the impact of belief systems on organization form.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The issue of sameness or uniqueness between religious organizations as a group is rather less explored. It is present in discussions of differences between, for example, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions within Christianity, as well as between the major world religions of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. When we take up the exploration of intra-religious organizational differences, we find that those features that differentiate religious from nonreligious organizations also differentiate *between* religious organizations. In particular, there are theological/value differences within Christianity (and any religious belief system) that have strong implications for authority and decision making, professionalization and bureaucratization, hierarchy, congregational independence, governance, and organizational forms and structures generally. Also, churches and their individual units are embedded in different sociocultural settings that impact organizational practice.

As we pointed out earlier, a special characteristic of religious groups is the conceptualization and relationship to a sacred other, a divine being or beings. But the way the sacred is conceptualized is a differentiating feature amongst religious organizations and, through the more systematic theological development of this idea, fundamentally shapes their organizational forms. In particular, the way the sacred is conceptualized will strongly impact the system of authority, especially around whether the relationship of an individual to God is direct or through an intermediary such as a priest (Sommerfeld, 1968).

Beliefs, Authority, and Decision-Making Differences

An important distinction between religious organizations is the role of the priesthood and the religious hierarchy, in particular, how, if at all, a religious functionary mediates the relationship between church members and God. Mediation in the Catholic Church comes from a particular belief system that has been a historic part of both Christianity and Judaism − one that concerns the special role of priests. Indeed, one of the most important elements of the Protestant Reformation in Christianity was to draw on the notion of "a priesthood of all believers," which effectively created direct access to God for all adherents. As Ranson et al. (1977, p. 39) put it, "unlike many occupations, the full-time religious functionary has many models of his (stet) role and position on which to draw. These models emanate from his views on a number of complex issues such as the role of the Church in the world, the nature of the priesthood, the nature of God, etc." A key difference is that, within the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christianity there is an ontological view of the priesthood, whereas in the Protestant tradition there is a functional view. Catholicism's conception of hierarchy in the church is a divine gift to Christianity − which is not merely expedient but also necessary (Pittenger, 1966). Whereas the Protestant (and evangelical) tradition emphasizes conversion, oratory, and simplicity of worship. The latter effectively leads to more congregational forms of organization, with much less emphasis on rituals and symbolism.

This aspect of how far authority rests with a priesthood with a special religious status or with a wider set of congregational leaders has effects on member commitment (Hougland & Wood, 1980). In Protestant churches in the USA, the amount of control that members' felt led to higher commitment (conceptualized as satisfaction, identification, and involvement). Specifically, whether the denomination was congregational or hierarchical − a feature related to the theological position of the organization on church governance − was important. Members in congregational forms with a "priesthood of all believers" notion of spiritual authority showed larger amounts of control. However, there were general organizational elements that had an impact on authority. Denomination size and church size impacted feelings of control in a negative way primarily because size, both locally and nationally, produced a greater degree of hierarchy, regardless of theological beliefs. This is, of course, a well-known finding in organization theory (Donaldson, 2001). These findings highlight the interaction between beliefs and scale, and between specific religious categories and general organizational ones.

There is variation between religious organizations on the extent to which scriptures (sacred texts) are regarded as authoritative and also on the interpretation of those texts. In their study of three fundamentalist churches Nelson and Hiller (1981) found that, with a strongly articulated set of beliefs, religious legitimations were frequently invoked − such that, authority in the church comes from God and the scriptures. While, since this work, the term "fundamentalist" has acquired some negative meanings for all world religions, in the religious context, it relates to the authoritative nature of sacred texts in determining beliefs, and that they are strongly held by those in authority as well as in the general membership. There are strong differences in mainstream Christian churches between liberals and conservatives (Ranson et al., 1977; Stark & Finke, 2000) that are based in such issues as the authoritative nature of scripture and the divinity of Jesus. These differences are then worked through in organizational differences (Dyck et al., 2005).

So, the institutionalized authority structures in religious organizations mobilize behavior (McMullen, 1994). The institutionalized form of authority points to differences between religious organizations. Utilizing the language of neo-institutional theory and Meyer and Rowan (1977) in particular, "the myths of apostolic succession and infallibility legitimate the institutional authority of the Pope and successive levels of bishop and priest" (McMullen, 1994, p. 712). This contrasts, for example, with the United Church of Christ's polity, which is based on congregational autonomy − wherein the spirit of Christ guides action and the Bible is authoritative. In sum, the more hierarchical, tightly structured religious organization enables knowledge of, and behavior related to organizational norms to be more widely shared; whereas the decentralized, loosely structured church relies on the external motivation of church members to generate awareness of organizational norms. These are variations based on beliefs systems, producing organizational differences, but those differences also have similar effects to those found between any centralized or decentralized organizations.

Religious organizations that *normatively* define themselves as churches are more ecclesial and hierarchical in authority and structure (Benson & Hassinger, 1972). Churches formalize programs and activities; they tend to have more resources for those programs. And, with their program and activity focus, they produce more formalization/ bureaucratization, larger scale, and resource dependency. Congregationally based or independent churches are more focused on strongly expressed beliefs, spiritual growth and discipleship and evangelism (Bibby, 2002). Again the differences come

from differences in belief about authority, the role of religious functionaries and individual members, but are also impacted by scale and resources.

Clearly, the issue of how beliefs impact structure is a very important one, yet there has been very little direct examination of this linkage. One of the only studies is Dyck et al. (2005) who assert that while there has been a considerable amount of research that generically accepts a relationship between religious beliefs, "surprisingly little of that research has specifically examined the relationship between the values evident in different religions and the practices of those religious organizations (p. 52)." They examine this relationship through the ideas of mechanistic and organic organizations (Burns & Stalker, 1961), drawing on the basic elements of centralization, formalization, and adherence to the status quo. They analyzed the presence of these organizational features in *statements of faith*, and then examined their presence in the actual organizational practices of religious organizations. They found a relationship between the content of religious statements of faith and the structure and practice of religious places of worship. What is particularly interesting and unusual about this study is that it not only covers Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant places of worship, but also, Muslim, Mormon, Jewish, Bahai, and nondenominational places of worship. Interestingly, there were key differences between, on the one hand, Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, and Muslims and, on the other hand, Bahai, Baptists, and Mennonite groups. The former group is more likely to be centralized, formalized, and show adherence to the status quo than the latter group. Their analysis, thus, underscores the differences between religious organizations.[1]

There is an idea here of structural elaboration and complexity that is important. Indeed, organization theory has shown how the elaboration of such organizational elements as specialization, formalization, decentralization take place with both increasing age and increasing scale (Donaldson, 2001; Stinchcombe, 1965). This happens with religious organizations, produced both by scale and age, but also by the organizational consequences of beliefs. Religious organizations that do not have the requisite structural elaboration have been labeled as organizationally precariousness (Dann, 1976; Welch, 1977). The defining elements of organizational precariousness are "a relative lack of diversity in organizational activities and an implicit, low degree of structural elaboration … the resource base (defined as congregation size and total financial assets) appears to be rather meager and unstable and … the central 'paradoxes of institutionalization' are still being resolved" (Welch, 1977, p. 132). This kind of elaboration is bureaucratic in nature, especially through formalization. For long-term survival a certain

amount of bureaucratization is necessary. Once again there is a dual argument here, in terms of our overall questions. On the one hand, it suggests that religious organizations are subject to the same pressures as other organizations, that is, becoming more bureaucratized with scale and age. But, on the other hand, the extent to which they will become bureaucratized is also impacted and mediated by the belief system.

CONCLUSION

We have reviewed the historical development of the treatment of religious organizations in journals centered on religion through the lens of three questions namely: (1) are religious organizations different from other kinds of organizations? (2) what factors produce differences or similarities between religious and other organizations? and (3) are religious organizations different from each other?

As one might expect from work published in journals of religion, the starting point is definitely that religious organizations are different from nonreligious organizations and some of the literature we have reviewed supports this view. The rationale is that religious organizations are based in beliefs and that issues of organization are theological. Authority is a theological concept that relates to the nature of the relationship of a believer to the divine − in particular, whether this is essentially a direct relationship or one through an intermediary (Chaves, 1993b; Sommerfeld, 1968). Also, a range of other organizational practices are present in statements of faith (Dyck et al., 2005; Mutch, 2009) and the concept of organization itself is theological. Organizationally, Etzioni (1961) classified religious organizations as "normative" and therefore different from nonreligious organizations.

However, recurring themes in these analyses are the impact of bureaucracy and the influence of societal templates of organizing on religious organizations. Beginning with Weber and throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, all organizational sectors were examined in terms of the extent to which they were bureaucratized (Perrow, 1986; Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1969). The bureaucratization of religious organizations is a dominant theme. A number of explanations have been put forward for this − three of which are related to classical contingency theory concepts. First, there is the impact of scale: as organizations grow (e.g., from sects to churches) they adopt greater degrees of specialization, formalization, and

standardization. Second, geographical dispersion produces decentralization and also an increase in the administrative component of the organization (Hinings & Bryman, 1974). And third, the long history of many religious organizations (age) produces a strong institutionalization of both beliefs and practices.

However, the argument is not quite straightforwardly a contingency one in that, for these organizations contingency variables (size, spatial distribution, and age) are derived from theology/beliefs as well as processes of organizational development and congregational socioeconomic circumstances. It is the beliefs of the religious organization that lead to growth or to spatial coverage (Hinings & Foster, 1973). *Thus, the impact of generic contingent factors can be mediated by beliefs as well as "put into play" by them.*

These observations raise some interesting issues and questions for organization theory in general. For instance, if beliefs play this role in religious organizations, is there a similar situation in nonreligious organizations? Are theology and beliefs in religious organizations the same as culture, values, ethics, and mission statements in nonreligious organizations? Are mission statements the equivalent of "statements of faith"? The culture literature (cf. Hofstede, 2001; Martin, 2002) has been more concerned with outlining the best way to conceptualize and measure the concept rather than examine its relationship to organizational structure and activities. Also, do the culture and values of a nonreligious organization have the same relationship to aspects such as scale, markets, ownership − as is suggested for religious organizations? These questions, we suggest, are worthy of further examination.

Another important theme, similar to that of bureaucratization, is the way in which institutional templates of society generally impact religious organizations and, vice versa. Secularization, which is such an important issue in the discussion of religion, points to a key means by which the relationship between religion and society has changed markedly (Demerath et al., 1998). While Dyck et al. (2005) and Mutch (2009) can locate their approaches in the work of Weber and his work on the impact of the Protestant Ethic on economic growth, most of the work on differentiating religious from nonreligious organizations is concerned with the impact of the secular on the sacred. The mechanisms for this operate in a variety of ways.

One mechanism originates in the voluntary and local nature of churches. Those members who occupy positions on parish councils, boards of elders, boards of deacons, etc., bring with them the ideas and experiences they acquire in the secular world. Templates of "legitimate" organizational forms from business and elsewhere become part of the discussion of

appropriate organization. Because of the supposed primacy of belief, this is an area of tension for religious organizations.

A further mechanism is the active pursuit of nonreligious organizational models per se. The last 30 years, for instance, have seen a strong church growth movement, particularly within Christian churches, that has drawn on secular notions of leadership, teams, programs, etc. There has also been a growing emphasis on marketing as a means to increase membership as well as the use of consultants to advise on strategies for growth, marketing, and organization. These kinds of trends suggest the *active* pursuit of nonreligious templates within the religious sphere. They also underscore Chaves' (1993a) notion of parallel structures. As religious organizations develop agency activities and structures (publishing houses, school systems, missionary organizations, music distributors, etc.), there is a much greater pressure for these to operate with templates derived from their secular counterparts. Indeed, Chaves labels this phenomenon "internal secularization." This is a particularly important, nonstudied area for organization theory that takes us back to some classic concerns about the relationships between the differentiated components of organizations (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

There has also been an importation of templates of organizing that are determinedly "antiorganization" (Lindsay, 2010; Packard, 2011). While these may stem from attempts to resist typical patterns of institutionalization within religious organizations, they may also be the result of antiorganization tendencies within the wider society. As such they represent a type of religious organization that is not uncommon, but which has not been studied. They are new, emerging organizational archetypes from which we can learn much.

From the viewpoint of organization theory, these kinds of developments provide a potentially exciting arena for institutional theory. Because of their basis in beliefs, religious organizations provide fertile ground for examining the diffusion and dissemination of those beliefs and the ways in which they impact practice, especially organizational form. What our review reveals is that there are a variety of organizational forms within religion, which are related to both internal and external belief systems. Examining how an important sector of society produces a variety of templates (and logics!) and manages all of them — as well as being subject to pressures from nonreligious organizations — would certainly speak to contemporary issues of institutional complexity and pluralism (Greenwood, Raynard, Micelotta, Kodeih, & Lounsbury, 2011; Kraatz & Block, 2008).

There is a tendency in organization theory research to "overgeneralize" findings and, indeed, to search for the most general principle possible in theorizing. We suggest the need for the "rebirth" of a comparative organizations perspective in organization theory − one that appreciates the similarities and differences *between* sectors and *within* sectors. Our review of the work on religious organizations shows that not only are there differences between religious and nonreligious organizations, but there are also substantial differences between religious organizations. Our review also points to the similarities between religious and nonreligious organizations, as well as similarities between religious organizations. We believe that the way forward for both the study of religious organizations and organizational theory in general is to look for the explanations for these similarities and differences and to be truly concerned with a comparative organizations approach (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2009).

There are a number of further issues that are worth mentioning, even though they have not been central in this particular article. Sutton and Chaves (2004) underline the points made here, that religious organizations are remarkably diverse in terms of beliefs and organizational forms. And they suggest that they have distinctive population dynamics, essentially through schism and merger. Schisms are a particularly important dynamic in religious organizations, something that is part of their difference (Dyck & Starke, 1999). Those schisms primarily come from different interpretations of beliefs. Thus, they are a fruitful source for studying births and deaths, especially because schisms and mergers are normative for the population.

Also, there is increasing religious diversity in the United States (and indeed, in all Western countries) owing to shifts in the pattern of immigration − changing from European-based, to Latin America and Asia (Williams, 2007). There are now significant numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in Western countries. As is apparent from the work that we have surveyed, there is a paucity of organizational research conducted outside Western Christianity (one exception is Dyck et al., 2005). There is a recognized, but unarticulated, relationship between the dominant organizational forms of civil society and those of Protestant religious organizations − particularly in the form of congregations. There is an institutional logic underlying these forms, premised on voluntarism, individual authenticity, and localism. While Islam has a congregational form through the mosque, neither Buddhism nor Hinduism do. There is a rich field of comparative organizational research waiting to be conducted here.

In a similar vein, church-sect theory may have been an appropriate framework for explaining the evolution of European Christianity, but it does not capture the complexity of contemporary religious organization; and further, its applicability to other faiths such as Islam is not obvious (Dawson, 2011). The new religious movements that characterize the early twenty-first century partly reflect processes of globalization and secularization, and cannot be accounted for fully through the relatively simple church-sect logic (Robbins & Lucas, 2007). As with so many theories about religious organization (and organizations generally), it is "too Western" in the sense that "its roots in early Christian theology sometimes makes it inhospitable to other faiths" and that it has "a tendency to reduce every facet of society to crass organizational terms" (Demerath et al., 1998, p. ix).

In conducting this review, we hoped to illuminate the many rich fields of research that could be found in the study of religious organizations. Our aim was thus aligned with increasing calls for more research exploring the intersection between religion and organization (Tracey, 2012) − as a means to leverage the potential for cross-fertilization between secular organizational analysis and religious scholarship.

NOTE

1. While studies by Dyck (1997) and Dyck and Starke (1999) also concern religious organizations, they are set within different frameworks of organization theory and no conclusions are drawn concerning the role of religion in these organizations.

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