



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND FULFILLMENT

Faith Traditions and Practices in the Workplace Volume I

*The Role of Religion in
Unprecedented Times*

Edited by
Mai Chi Vu · Nadia Singh
Nicholas Burton · Irene Chu

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Palgrave Studies in Workplace Spirituality and Fulfillment

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Editors

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Preface

Without the Protestant religion, capitalism could never have come into being. This argument, proposed by Max Weber, the forefather of modern sociology, demonstrates how the influence of religion was considered to be vital to an understanding of world events in previous times. However, it is evident that most modern scholars do not attribute the same degree of importance to religion and spirituality, despite more of the world becoming more religious. This book attempts to counter this trend by presenting a diverse set of chapters sharing a common theme—how religion and spirituality can contribute to our understanding and provide solutions for organisations and individuals facing challenges in unprecedented times.

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Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to Prof. Ron Beadle at Northumbria University for inspiring us to compile this volume. Ron has been an endless source of inspiration, advice, and support throughout the process. We are also grateful to Palgrave Macmillan team. The initial idea of this book comes from a conference organized by Ron at Northumbria University in 2021 titled “Faith in Business” and the authors’ engagement with the Management, Spirituality & Religion division at the Academy of Management, where collaborations with scholars and practitioners across many religious, spiritual, and indigenous traditions were developed and nurtured. This volume represents the voices of many different scholars from different traditions around the world as a result.

Praise for *Faith Traditions and Practices in the Workplace Volume I*

“At work, just like in any endeavor, we strive to bring in the whole person to bring out the best in them, not only with a view to personal fulfillment, but also in service to the common good. None of this would be possible without the serious consideration of spirituality, faith, and religion in the workplace, as these volumes presently offer. Often cast as sources of social support and an experience of transcendence, purpose, and meaning, their main role, however, is to serve as anchors of truth. They constitute our main defense against abuses of wealth and power and our most reliable guide towards flourishing.”

—Alejo José G. Sison, *Professor of Business Ethics, University of Navarra (Spain)*

“This two-volume edited work is an important contribution to the growing recognition of the role of religion in building societies where pluralism and the co-existence of different view-points are respected and valued. In many parts of the world, sectarian conflicts related to religious differences have led to an academic and professional discourse that criticises religion as the basis of those conflicts. This discourse has an essentialist, one-sided and imbalanced understanding of religion, whose other dimensions – of caring and of ‘the sigh of the oppressed’ – it neglects and ignores. Such neglect weakens societies’ capacity to intervene effectively to prevent situations that can cause sectarian conflicts. Organisations responding to the suffering caused by loss during the Covid epidemic witnessed the caring aspect of religion and the spiritual power of religion. The role of religion in everyday life in dealing with the growing global ecological crisis and possible ensuing social collapse is becoming increasingly evident. Religious practices can impact social behaviour in ways that contribute to strategies for mitigation of and adaptation to global climate change, and so are of pivotal importance in our current era of human societal evolution.”

—Pritam Singh, *Professor Emeritus Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford, UK*

“This two-volume collection bears an important message: in precarious times such as we presently endure, hark back to the wisdom of the sages. Anchored in a worldview informed by spiritual practice of olde, the timeless advice it enshrines may see us through our current travails. And in so doing provide valuable insights into our day-to-day.

The balance between Western and Eastern faith traditions is particularly welcome, enabling the reader a comprehensive outlook on the wisdom of the ages. And while the focus is on the different cultural modes of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and the world-wide crisis it ushered, the implications are much wider and point to lessons applicable to and for life. Well worth reading and carefully contemplating I highly recommend this collection to you.”

—Yochanan Altman, PhD, Visiting Professor, *WU Vienna, Austria,*
Honorary Research Fellow, University of Haifa, Israel, Chair,
International Association of Management Spirituality &
Religion, Publisher, Journal of Management, Spirituality &
Religion, Editor, IAMSR - De Gruyter series
Management, Spirituality & Religion

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sibility, sustainability, courage, caring economics, and ethical behaviour. Her work can be applied to organizations globally including promoting socially conscious management in emerging economies.

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Her interdisciplinary research interests are virtue ethics, especially the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Confucianism, cross-cultural studies, critical realism and institutional logics. She has publications in several journals including the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *British Journal of Management* and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.

Current projects include introducing a typology of goods into institutional logics, concepts of the self, eudaimonia (human flourish) in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in emerging markets, especially Africa.

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Legha Momtazian completed her PhD at the University of Sheffield, where she explored the application of the Bahá'í principles to employment relations, in a combined case study and scriptural research approach. Working at the University of Gloucestershire, she is involved in dataset design, empirical analysis, and international research publications in areas including job role visibility in a fashion supply chain, entrepreneurship initiatives among artists, and meaningful work and organisational justice.

Garrett Potts teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on religion's role in business and healthcare at the University of South Florida. His primary areas of research include work as a calling and servant leadership. Outside of the classroom, Garrett also enjoys working with professionals from various fields to maximize their leadership potential. In particular, his approach emphasizes care for healthcare patients and business stakeholders as whole persons, and it calls for an empathetic engagement with their religio-cultural backgrounds.

Angus Robson is Senior Lecturer in Business Ethics and Leadership with a specialism in Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. He completed his PhD in Leadership and Ethics in Scottish banking at Northumbria in 2014. His work has since been published in peer-reviewed journals including *Nursing Ethics*, the *Journal of Institutional Economics* and *Business Ethics: A European Review*.

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Sally Wightman is a lecturer at Northumbria University. Her research lies predominantly in the fields of meaningful work and virtue ethics. Her empirical work so far has largely been conducted within the context of faith-based organisations, for which she has practical experience prior to joining academia. Sally's PhD considers the role of tradition—as understood by moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre—in the experience and conceptualisation of meaningful work in Christian and secular homelessness charities, and her work has been published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* on the concept of calling and tradition-constituted rationality.

Abbreviations

ARC:	Alliance for Religion and Conservation
CEO:	Chief executive officer
CMIE:	Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy
GDP:	Gross domestic product
GHG:	Greenhouse gases
GOP:	Government of Punjab
GPN:	Green Pilgrimage Network
HYV:	High-yielding varieties
IBM:	International Business Machines
LGBT:	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MAF:	Million acre feet
NGO:	Nongovernmental organisation
OSB:	Order of St Benedict
PPE:	Personal protective equipment
PTSD:	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RSB:	Rule of St Benedict
SGGS:	Sri Guru Granth Sahib
SPV:	Solar photovoltaic panel
SWAN:	Stranded Workers Action Network
TERI:	The Energy and Research Institute
WHO:	World Health Organization

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Part I

Introduction



1

Introduction: Faith Traditions in Unprecedented Times

Mai Chi Vu, Nadia Singh, Nicholas Burton,
and Irene Chu

Religion and Grand Challenges

The world is besieged by manifold challenges today. The twenty-first century has been characterised by political instability, economic vulnerability, and social upheavals. Whether it is the current geo-political conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Johannesson & Clowes, 2022), rising indebtedness in developing countries (Klem & Samararatne, 2022), climate change-induced natural disasters, and disruptions to business resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, these grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015) remain firmly entrenched in the fabric of modern capitalist economies. This is despite continued economic growth over the last few

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decades, along with rapid technological and social progress. Simultaneously, hyper nationalism and populism are on the rise in many parts of the world (Suddaby et al., 2017), threatening the social cohesion of societies. Digital technologies have orchestrated massive disinformation campaigns which have led to social instability, extremism, and erosion of democratic principles across many regions of the world (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

These societal grand challenges constitute fundamental social, economic, and environmental concerns and “specific critical barriers that if removed would help us to solve important societal problems with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation” (Grand Challenges Canada, 2011, p. 4). The term grand challenge was first coined by David Hilbert, a German mathematician at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris in the year 1900 to refer to a set of twenty-three mathematical problems that were articulated to spur interest and dialogue among mathematicians, which in turn generated breakthroughs in mathematics, physics, and other scientific fields (Hilbert, 1902). In subsequent years, this idea of articulating challenges to focus efforts on addressing common problems began to be employed by national governments, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies, and academics (George et al., 2016). Due to their pervasive importance in the global economy, these global grand challenges have been encapsulated in various discourses, most notably in the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (Hák et al., 2016).

According to Ferraro et al. (2015) and Kniffin et al. (2021), these grand challenges are characterised by three main characteristics which make them formidable challenges for organisations. *Firstly*, grand challenges are complex, entailing many interactions and associations, emergent understandings, and nonlinear dynamics. *Secondly*, grand challenges confront organisations with radical uncertainty. As a result, actors cannot define the possible future state of the world and therefore cannot forecast the consequences of their present actions. *Thirdly*, grand challenges are evaluative and dynamic in nature, cutting across jurisdictional boundaries, implicating multiple criteria of worth, and revealing new concerns even as they are being tackled. Due to the enormity of these, a growing

number of organisational scholars are calling for research that addresses these grand challenges (George et al., 2016; Gümüşay et al., 2020). According to Colquitt and George (2011), “the fundamental principles underlying a grand challenge are the pursuit of bold ideas and the adoption of less conventional approaches to tackling large, unresolved problems” (p. 432).

These grand challenges by their very definition require co-ordinated and sustained efforts from a diverse set of stakeholders, including changes in individuals’ and societal behaviours (Ansari et al., 2013), changes to how institutions are organised (Gümüşay et al., 2020), and progress in digital technologies (George et al., 2021). Tackling grand challenges is fundamentally characterised as a managerial and scientific problem. However, some scholars propound that addressing these systemic challenges may be further enhanced by incorporating the role of religious influences and new philosophical paradigms (Gümüşay, 2020; Alshehri et al., 2021; Roman et al., 2020; Arslan, 2021). These scholars propound that inclusion of these religious approaches can steer management thinking away from the myopic focus on economic profitability, to new forms of collective action and other-focused orientations.

Looking Back to Move Forward

Scholars are increasingly seeing religion as a macro-institutional force (Ammerman, 1997; Brammer et al., 2007; Henley, 2017) with the potential to advance creative solutions to tackling global problems. Religion has been recognised as one of the major seven institutional logics within the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al., 2012). This is attributed to several reasons:

Firstly, tackling grand challenges requires commitment to certain values and principles that make the needed policy, economic and social changes sustainable. These values are often rooted in faith and religious beliefs as more than 84% of the world population identifies with a religious group (Hackett et al., 2015). Also, religion has historically played a significant role as the basis of moral values and beliefs in society and continues to be a significant social force in most regions. Existing studies associate

religious individuals with values such as increased self-awareness, higher self-control and better self-regulation (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), humanism and self-effacing attitudes (Lefkowitz, 2017), which in turn helps to amend one's behaviour against a superior ethical standard. It has also been argued that an individual's religious beliefs spill over to the workplace and affects organisational decisions in terms of risk, the social outcomes to be considered, and what is professed to be suitable in a particular context (Van Buren et al., 2020).

According to Grim (2016), "Values cannot be justified by the intellectual process alone, and faith must be involved. Indeed, faith—including the religious institutions and beliefs that sustain faith—offers a deep spring of values that provide a moral and ethical basis for long-term commitments and actions in support of addressing the challenges" (p. 3). This is best exemplified in how Pope Francis's 2015 papal encyclical on climate change *Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home)* drew global interest and acclamation for its connection of Christian values to practical action for the protection and stewardship of nature (Francis & McDonagh, 2016).

Secondly, the role of religion as a global force is on the rise in many parts of the world including South Asia, Middle East, and Africa with the re-emergence of religious identities and sentiments (Syed et al., 2018). Recent analysis carried out by the Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith found that religious populations outgrow non-religious populations (World Economic Forum, 2018). As businesses increasingly operate in a global marketplace (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2015) with a diverse set of stakeholders, cultures, and religious traditions, faith will remain an important influence that shapes economic values and marketplaces. In this context, Ted Childs, a former International Business Machines (IBM) executive, remarked, "faith is the next big issue corporations will need to grapple with, in a similar way they have had to address issues related to Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender communities" (Childs, 2005, p. 76).

Thirdly, faith communities can provide a helpful perspective on each global challenge and contribute to implementing creative solutions. For instance, in 2015 faith leaders from thirty major religious groups gave a clarion call to individuals and organisations to end global poverty by

2030 as a moral imperative (World Bank, 2015). Their common statement read:

We in the faith community embrace this moral imperative because we share the belief that the moral test of our society is how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring. Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst.

Beyond poverty alleviation, faith communities can also contribute to fostering increased economic well-being in society. An empirical study by Grim et al. (2014) based on a sample of seventy-three countries concluded that religious freedom and intercultural understanding remain an important pre-requisite for inclusive economic growth. Several recent studies have also highlighted how faith leaders are re-interpreting the wisdom and principles enshrined in different religions to generate a heightened sense of ecological consciousness in people and tackle issues of climate change (Luetz & Nunn, 2020; Biviano, 2013; Hitzhusen, 2012).

Despite these factors, existing research on the role of religious influences in solving organisational grand challenges remains in the nascent stage of development. There have been few publications which have analysed the role of religious influences in tackling grand challenges (Chirico, 2021; Roman et al., 2020). According to scholars like Kirton and Greene (2015) religion continues to be simply an “organisational catchphrase” that is underexplored in business and management research. The present work contributes to existing scholarship in the area by analysing how different faith traditions can act as a moral bulwark and contribute to the creation of coping mechanisms and explanatory frameworks to deal with the unprecedented challenges that we face in the twenty-first century.

Following the introductory chapter, volume one of *Faith Traditions and Practices in the Workplace* brings together major world religions including Hinduism, Sikhism, Abrahamic religion and Christianity, as well as under-represented traditions such as Quakerism and Bahaim in eight chapters. The contributions in this volume offer a combination of theoretical and empirical approaches to explore the influences of religious traditions in addressing challenges in the workplace. Interdisciplinary studies and emergent research designs such as ethnography (Wilson &

Chaddha, 2009) and case studies (Yin, 2011) are included where relevant. The various chapters in this book offer up-to-date international scholarship on the role of religious influences as “coping mechanisms” for organisations in unprecedented times, addressing issues such as sustainable development, economic well-being, poverty, economic inequalities, and responsible business. This book is organised in a manner that not only covers main religions, but also, within many chapters (where possible and appropriate), there is a specific focus on organisational approaches, experiences, contestations, and opportunities with regard to religious influences at the workplace.

Summary of Chapters

This section is devoted to presenting a summary of each chapter included in the edited volume.

Chapter 2—“Sikhism and COVID-19: Ethics of Community Service and Activism” by Nadia Singh—uses the categories of recovery, reform, and restoration to generate empirical evidence on the role of Sikh community in India to create new models of community ownership and sharing of resources. This chapter analyses through practical examples and case studies how Sikh organisations and individuals employed four basic *ethe* of the Sikh faith: *nishkam seva* (selfless service), *langar* (community kitchens), *sarbat da Bhalla* (well-being of all), and *shahadat* (self-sacrifice) to create new models of collective action and community service, moving beyond individualistic orientations and self-actualisation. The varied examples presented in the chapter highlight that these principles and practices were not employed in a prescriptive way, but these were adapted and modified to offer coping mechanisms to deal with the health and socio-economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The chapter highlights how other-focused values embedded in Sikhism such as selfless service, community-based action, and incorporating the well-being of all in one’s moral actions can help in resetting the moral compass of organisations during unprecedented times. These principles can help to incorporate an other-focused orientation in organisational initiatives, transcending short-term profitability and self-interest.

Chapter 3—“Sikhism and Sustainability: New Approaches to Environmental Ethics” by Nadia Singh—uses case study research to document the part played by Sikh organisations and community leaders in solving the ecological problems, particular to Indian Punjab and creating people-centric models of environmental governance. The research documents how these organisations are recovering wisdom in ancient Sikh traditions and using these to solve contemporary ecological challenges. Sikh environmental projects provide new and innovative decentralised models to transition to a sustainable development trajectory. The various cases presented in the chapter are how Sikh practices such as *Seva* (volunteerism) and *sangat* (congregation) and *sarbat da Bhalla* (well-being of all) can help to create a social ethos towards environmental protection, foster community-based environmental projects, and extend the conception of well-being to environmental well-being as well. These principles can provide mechanisms to individual organisations to create “bottoms up” policy design with active partnership of a range of stakeholders including environmentally conscious individuals, community leaders, and grass-root religious organisations, and “nudge” them towards positive environmental action.

Chapter 4—“*The Connection Between ‘Work as a Calling’ and Social Capital During Unprecedented Times*” by Garrett Potts and Sally Wightman—uses ethnographic case study research of a Christian organisation in the hospitality industry to consider how the doctrine of “work as a calling” can mitigate declining social capital, which often occurs following unprecedented circumstances. The authors elaborate on how the notion of “Work as a calling” in communities embodying distinct traditions helps to foster relationships based on collective dedication to historically established standards of excellence. This shared sense of commitment and trust required to accomplish the ends of one’s calling provides the very resources that supply the social capital often depleted during unprecedented times. Through the case study research, the authors illustrate how co-workers who collectively viewed their “work as a calling” could navigate threats to the survival of their organisation brought about by the financial ramification of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the trust they had in one another and their shared normative commitment to a noble purpose.

Chapter 5—“Discernment: A Forgotten Approach to Collaborative Decision-Making in Unprecedented and Turbulent Times?” by Nicholas Burton—illuminates the possibilities (and challenges) of using discernment to instil new forms of collaborative decision-making in secular organisations during unprecedented times. Decision-making in discernment tradition is experienced through introspection, imagery, and imagination, by memory guidance, body awareness, and sensitivity to nature or approached through spiritual or religious means such as contemplative silence, prayer, pursuit of community belonging, and the abiding sense of unity.

Chapter 6—“The Presbyterian Virtue of Thrift in Traditional Scottish Banking” by Angus Robson—explores the role of thrift from the perspective of its traditional association with Presbyterianism in Scotland. The author presents a broad view of the concept of thrift and its connection with Protestantism. This is then supported by empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews from leaders in Scottish banking gathered in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007/8, which is shown as a failure of financial stewardship. The author then goes on to discuss how the concept of thrift may be employed to solve contemporary problems related to social, economic, and ecological aspects of sustainability.

Chapter 7—*Mitigating Distress: Building Resiliency with Balance and Spiritual Well-Being* by Sheila Hanson and Ksenia Keplinger—evaluates how the principles embedded in the Order of St Benedict (OSB) can help to improve psychological well-being and enhance organisational capacity to build resilience. The Rules of St Benedict is a governance tool which helps individuals to find a sense of community and achieve balance between routines and non-work activities. The authors cite several examples and elucidate how these rules/ principles can be applied beyond monastic communities to secular workplaces and contribute to reduction in psychological stresses such as work anxiety, hopelessness, and the lack of meaning in one’s existence that accompany unprecedented times.

Chapter 8—“Morally Responsible Behaviour in Unprecedented Times: Relevance of Sacred Texts of Abrahamic Religions to Workplace Behaviour” by Susan S. Case—provides a theoretical discourse on ethical traditions embodied in sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and