

ACCOUNTANTS, ECONOMISTS AND NEEDLES

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ABSTRACT

Accountants may find the journey through the eye of a needle hazardous, since they are implicated in wealth creation. Although there is evidence of a theological critique of economics and the world of business, there seems zero supply or demand for extending this to accountancy. There have been some attempts to provide such broad definitions of religion that virtually everything is included, and in this vein accountancy would be included. However this is a skewed and misleading use of language. In a 'secular' age there remains residual use of religious language, which occasionally infiltrates accountancy, but only in general metaphorical terms, and never with reference to the essence of accounting. As notions of corporate governance are applied to religions, accountancy has an inevitable role to play, as it does in the accounting for religions. This is the impact of accounting on religions. What is difficult to divine is any realistic theologising on accountancy.

Keywords: theology, accountancy, secularism, religions, economics, business ethics

INTRODUCTION

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Christian Bible, New Testament: Matthew 19: 24).

Since accountants, maybe excluding some of the academic ones, are invariably rich, it is clear that their entry into the kingdom of heaven is far from guaranteed. However we are not concerned with questions of individual salvation, but rather with whether accountancy as a discipline is amenable to

theologising. The overall conclusion is that it is not. It is a technical discipline, more a matter of models, trade-off and convention, and to this theology has little to offer by way of insight. What would, for example, a theology of statistics look like? One could make the general theological statement that 'all creation is part of God's realm', and although one might not wish to admit that there are no go areas, some seem less amenable to theological reflection than others.

It is different when it comes to matters of finance and economics. However even this connection was not always so easy to formulate, (Durkheim 1915: 419):

Only one form of social activity has not yet been expressly attached to religion: that is economic activity. Sometimes processes that are derived from magic have, by that fact alone, an origin that is indirectly religious. Also, economic value is a sort of power or efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Also, richness can confer many; therefore it has it. Hence it is seen that the ideas of economic value and of religious value are not without connection. But the question of the nature of these connections has not yet been studied.

Cardinal Newman (1873) warned theologians about trespassing into political economics, much as they had wandered into astronomy and claimed the sun circled the earth. Oslington (2000: 6) is uneasy about reducing the relationship between theology and economics to deduction of one from the other. Although there were some theological structures within the economic theory of the likes of Adam Smith and Malthus, theological elements become less explicit as we enter the 20th century (op. cit., 4).

Attempts have been made to bring a theological perspective to the world of business (Vinten, 1994, 1997). However when problems are encountered with the less problematic areas of economics and business, it does not bode well for the unexplored territory of accountancy.

ACCOUNTANCY: CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES?

The Managerial Auditing Journal (MAJ), of which the writer was Editor, has published articles from the Muslim world. There has been nothing deliberate or premeditated in this, other than the editor wanted to gain universal coverage, including the Muslim world which deserved to be better known. Maybe the polite reception to potential contributors, and word of mouth, encouraged others to submit.

It was interesting the Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal (AAAJ) considered that Christianity was being neglected and as a counterbalance produced a special issue called "Theological perspectives in accounting" (McPhail, Gorringer & Gray, 2004). The aim was to explore whether a theological approach to accounting was possible and assess the insights that might be culled from a Judeo-Christian reading of accounting. The perception of MAJ was interesting since it had certainly given coverage to Christian themes on rare occasions, if integral to the subject matter rather than an end in itself, and the articles from the Muslim world rarely if ever mentioned Islam explicitly. Perhaps it was this neglect of religion and particularly Christianity which bugged the AAAJ folk.

Accounting did not seem the best way to explore theology, since it is a largely technical discipline which may, theologically, reflect God's creation, but may not directly be that creation. In the dichotomy of God and Man, accounting seems to be more of Man than of God! It is hardly surprising when the AAAJ people reflect upon the lack of coverage or, indeed, interest, in the topic. Most contributors to AAAJ before and after the special issue discuss accounting within churches. This is an entirely different matter, since it is self-evident that accounting will have relevance within churches. For one thing, it is a legal requirement to have it. This, however, is a long way from artificially constructing a theology of it.

Jacobs and Walker (2004) challenge the assumption that accounting has no role in a religious or sacred setting. In the Christian Iona Community their rule requires all full-members to account to each other for their use of money and time. However, their fundamental distinction between individualising and socialising accountability is not clear. Structures of individualising accountability could be resisted. Structures of socialising accountability, while seen as positive and empowering, could function as varieties of internalised surveillance and domination. So first of all, this is accounting within a religious community and secondly there are significant dysfunctional aspects to it.

Booth (1993) finds that religious beliefs tend to create resistance to accounting with organizational members and occupational groups, such as the clergy and accountants, in the construction and opposition of such processes of resistance. Irvine (2005) studies attitudes to budgeting in a local church. It is her opinion that academic accounting research has under-estimated the significance of religion in life in an 'academic blind spot'. She uses the Booth (1993) framework relating to the potential conflict between the "sacred" church and "secular" accounting. She found that clergy and lay people did not view accounting as an unwelcome intrusion, but rather integrated belief in their

church's mission with the need to raise and manage money. Even sacred organizations need to recognize the reality of money and accounting to guarantee success, she says. If they cannot obtain or account for their resources, their ability to fulfil their mission may be weakened.

Jacobs (2005) evaluates the sacred-secular thesis developed by Richard Laughlin and Peter Booth, which is that accounting is antithetical to religious values, encapsulating the secular rather than the sacred. He draws upon Christian thinkers like John Wesley and Richard Niebuhr to reject this position, indicating that accounting and financial issues do not need to conflict with religious values. Within the Church of Scotland, he found a jurisdictional conflict between accountants and clergy rather than a sacred-secular divide. Sacred or secular accounting he considers more as a question of perception.

Hardy and Ballis (2005) agree. The divide has been used to highlight the ambiguous roles of accountants and accounting practices within religious organizations. However accountants and accounting practices are not by virtue of their secularity antithetical to the values of religious organizations, they argue. Often, secular activities, such as accounting, co-exist, promote and support religions. Gallhofer and Haslam (2004) argue from liberation theology for a more emancipatory accounting with new insights and inspiration.

There are examples of accounting and auditing Standards within the Islamic fold. Thus Malaysian Accounting Standard Board (MASB, 2004) provides an accounting standard for presenting the financial statements of Islamic financial institutions. Within the Standard there is cogent argument as to why it was necessary. The Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI), an accounting and auditing standards setting body in Bahrain, has been active in developing and promoting Islamic accounting, auditing, and Shariah standards, and the Malaysian Standard acknowledges a debt of gratitude. So does this disprove the point and lead one towards a theology of accounting? The answer is only in the most limited fashion. The Standard is only concerned with Islamic financial institutions, and it is no surprise that this should recognise religious principles. The Standard is isolated – there is no other 'religious' Standard about general company accounting and auditing. So this is exactly the same as found within Christianity.

Tayeb (1997) refers to the differing manifestations of Islamic values within countries which may impact differentially on human resource management (HRM). She indicates the problems in attempting to isolate the influences of Islam on organizations from those of other institutions, such as the economy, politics and businesses. She considers it unwise to suggest an Islamic HRM model. Nevertheless, since Islam is all-encompassing, it is bound to have

implications for certain aspects of organizational practice, especially in those countries which are organized and run in accordance with Islamic principles.

Abbe Le Pelley writes from the Dubai Ethics Resource Centre (DERC), a not for profit organization, established under the Chamber of Commerce in Dubai:

It is our aim to promote awareness in and an understanding of corporate responsibility, including social, environmental, governance and ethical issues in the area of business both in the Emirate and wider Middle East region. We work through various channels such as program development, training, consulting and research.

The research project is currently entering its second phase, and the results of the first phase can be found on our website (www.dcci.gov.ae/derc). The findings of our local research touch upon the influence of religion, which, as you rightly suggest, plays a strong role on life in the country. For example, local businesses have traditionally been influenced by religion through avenues such as Zakat, one of the pillars of Islam. This is a form of charity tax. Muslims whose wealth is above a certain limit must pay a percentage of this (in most cases 2.5%) to the poor and needy. As a result, many local businesses have a strong tradition of elements of corporate responsibility, such as philanthropy, which is deeply intertwined in the local culture and plays a key role during religious periods such as Ramadan.

Obviously religion is playing a role in business, which can be witnessed by the growth of Islamic finance, both locally and internationally. However, DERC is not currently engaged in work specifically addressing the subject at this time and we have not yet come across any challenges in working with either local or international companies regarding this issue.

Walsh (2006, 201) criticizes Charfi's argument to separate religion and politics in Islamic countries: "What the Islamist assumes is that God's law is totally applicable across all areas of life: from the boardroom to the schoolroom."

SECULARIZATION?

Paradox abounds. Thus, to Bruce (2002), Americans are fond of churches, yet much American religion does not seem especially religious (p. 34). There is no

secularization theory, but rather a 'cluster of testable explanations that cohere as well as anything in the social sciences' (p. 39). The secularization case is that: "...religion diminishes in social significance, becomes increasingly privatized, and loses salience *except where it finds work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural*" (p. 30).

Bruce points out what is not being argued. Decline will be anything but uniform or linear (p. 175), and secularization is neither universal nor inevitable (p. 37). The paradigm is not progressive. The endpoint is not necessarily atheism, since it is considered likely that religion will persist, albeit being less significant than in the past in the workings of the social system (p. 41). Ubiquitous are the various synonyms of "non-organized" religion, religious potential, receptivity to religion, spirituality, implicit religion and incipient religion. The principle seems to be "The broader the definition of religion, the more of it you will find" (p. 199).

RELIGIOUS METAPHOR

To connect accountancy with theology, or somehow shoe-horn one into the other, the most fertile person to do it is Cupitt (1999). He considers that the most important religious event of the 20th century has so far passed almost unnoticed, and this is the "sacralization of life" (p. 2). He refers to how the word "God" has largely disappeared from popular discourse, to be refocused around idioms about life, and he collects countless examples of this from "Get a life" to "Your whole life is ahead of you". Quite why this should be called a religion is unclear. He argues that:

...when people abandon traditional religious allegiance, they do not suddenly stop using religious language, having religious feelings, and thinking in religious ways. Far from it: all these things remain, but frustrated now and urgently seeking a fresh love-object. When they find it, they will latch on to it fiercely... – the perfect replacement for one's former but now failing sense of religious identity (pp. 9–10).

It is highly unlikely that accountancy is in any sense the "fresh love-object".

Religions certainly drew upon life, and their sacred texts are full of parables, homilies and analogies drawn from life's experience – from what else, after all, is there to draw upon? It does not, therefore, seem so remarkable that 'life' should return with reciprocity to incorporate religious metaphor. The trouble with such philosophical cum theological writing is devoid of any empirical

research. His argument is drawn from novelists and philosophers unproven as to their influence across the population at large.

Curiously the world of work, where many spend large parts of their lives, is barely referred to, despite the not uncommon use of religious metaphor in the workplace. This does not bode well in any attempt to construct a theology of accountancy. Luther's permitting of vocation to a purely secular vocation is mentioned with the comment that we are still only able to regard some employments as vocations: the rest are just jobs (33). Cupitt also provides an example of the sacred and secular worlds beginning to flow together in the church at Long Melford. The saints in the stained glass windows were replaced by the well-to-do merchants and their wives whose money paid for the building (110).

THE CONUNDRUM

Short (1999) is the first in a "Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series", which immediately hits a conundrum:

One problem that such a series inevitable faces is the word 'spirituality'. For example, it is increasingly used beyond religious circles, and does not necessarily imply a faith tradition. Again, it could mean substantially different things for a Christian and a Buddhist. Within Christianity itself, the word in its modern sense is relatively recent. The reality that it stands for differs subtly in the different contexts of time and place. Historically, 'spirituality' covers a breadth of human experience and a wide range of values and practices. (12)

This reinforces the inevitability of the cross-walks we are likely to find between the sacred and the secular. With the Franciscan tradition it does not take long to find the link between the sacred and the secular in the form of commercialism. The superficiality and sentimentality of St Francis, the 'saint in the birdbath' garden kitsch, is alluded to, although this reference is not made totally disparagingly, since it is said to have continued the long artistic tradition which started just after his death (111). Another example is the Nativity scene, which Francis initiated to indicate the entry of God into the mundane life of poor people, and the world of creatures. This too has suffered its fair share of commercialisation.

We do need to bear in mind the strictures of CS Lewis who counselled against using the term Christianity merely to indicate that an action is to receive

moral approval. What we are discussing is different from this. It is the way in which the worlds of religion and business interlink. The use of religious language does not make the user religious, so to that extent CS Lewis is upheld. Religion is ingrained in the human experience, and it is not, therefore, so remarkable to find the language of religion infiltrating that of business, nor to find in this cross-fertilisation that religions qua businesses adopt the language and practices of business, including the nether side of business practice periodically. The influential philosopher Krishnamurti (1992, p. 161) reinforces the cross-fertilisation of secular on sacred when he avers that:

To be really profoundly serious is to be religious; not the kind of religion of going to temples, church services, and all that kind of stuff, that is not religion. The man who is diligent in his seriousness, that man is a truly religious man.

By seriousness, Krishnamurti refers to a consideration of all those issues which place the world in crisis and which, if not solved, may have catastrophic consequences. An individual's relationship to other people, to society and to life itself, is critical for this.

The Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Gustav Jung (1984, p. 282), wrote originally in 1933 in similar vein:

The living spirit grows and even outgrows its earlier forms of expression; it freely chooses the men in whom it lives and who proclaim it. This living spirit is eternally renewed and pursues its goal in manifold and inconceivable ways throughout the history of mankind.

His definition of religion is wide, and supportive of the continuation of the religious stream within the world of business. He cast his net over both Eastern and Western religions. According to Fordham (195, p. 71) religion is,

A peculiar attitude of mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word religion, which means a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors, that are conceived as 'powers': spirits, demons, gods, laws, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshipped and loved.

His notion of archetypes and the collective unconscious suggest that religious myth and symbolism will be enduring.

A BBC1 television programme "Canterbury Tales" (December 28, 1997) was produced on the 1400th anniversary of Canterbury Cathedral, the mother church of the Church of England. It indicated how cathedral clergy were reluctant businessmen, less happy with high finance than with high liturgy, running a multi-million pound business for which they had no expectation at ordination and no training. To the head verger, Fred Whittaker, it was running a business rather than something spiritual. He complained that his staff were not given pastoral support from the cathedral clergy. From the 1999 screened programme on St Paul's cathedral we were told that its annual cost is £6 million, with 60 per cent of its income coming from tourism and trading, and it costing £100,000 to maintain a night watch, a function that the chapter had been inclined to dispense with.

Christian materialism and commercialism is explored in McDannell (1995). Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, showed great commercial awareness when he stated that he wanted to start a religion – that's where the money lies. Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), in a speech of 1912 also managed to make the connection: "Business underlies everything in our national life, including our spiritual life. Witness the fact that in the Lord's Prayer, the first petition is for daily bread. No one can worship God or love his neighbour on an empty stomach."

Even though Roman Catholic thought was never quite so individualistic (e.g. Ryan 1916), and the World Council of Churches has made strides to help those enslaved to the worst excesses of modern industrial life, such efforts, important as they are admitted to have been, 'have dealt chiefly with systemic economic problems and not with the ethical problems of modern corporate organization' (Gunnemann, 1986).

A quotation from a church working party expresses well this ambivalence (Dyson, 1985, p. 13–14):

In fact, the 'visible' Church is a tangled mixture of asceticism and affluence, courage and compromise, devotion and destructiveness, faith and frailty, prayer and perfidy, sanctity and sin.

THE GOSPEL OF MONEY?

Religious texts do not primarily provide a religious perspective on business, so interpretation is ambiguous and uncertain, and this applies to money and wealth

creation. The peculiar juxtaposition of incompatible ethics has been rampant. For example, in 19th century America:

The magnitude of philanthropy reflected the magnitude of personal fortunes accumulated in the late nineteenth century. While religious scruples may have been dim as money was accumulated, they sparkled as money was dispensed. Denominational schools, churches, hospitals, and orphanages benefited handsomely from the gifts of Rockefeller, McCormick, Wanamaker, Cooke, Crozer, Stanford, Schiff, Rosenwald, and a great many others. (Gaustad 1966, p. 232)

There has always been the temptation to downplay criticism of the hand that feeds one, in this case the sponsorship of religious activity by the owners of large businesses. The American social gospel at its initiation in the 1880s inspired considerable hostility, such that when Walter Rauschenbusch tried to apply Christian principles to social and economic life, "a generation of theologians rose up in consternation" (Little, 1966, p. 69). The Catholic church, relying less on middle class philanthropy, was less reticent in raising its voice in protest against the degrading conditions accompanying industrialization.

The Bishop of Oxford asks whether there is a gospel for the rich, answering that the gospel applies to everyone, but that Christians should be fully active in the capitalistic world on the basis of two principles:

First there is a fundamental compatibility between many aspects of a market economy and the Christian faith, which makes it legitimate for Christians to participate. Secondly, because of human sin, we need to be continuously on the alert for the way the system gets skewed to further the interests of the powerful against the powerless. (Harries, 1992, p. 173)

Noll (2002) offers more concentrated and focused research and interpretation on the connections of Protestants and money, a topic described as being a mountain in which research has reached only to the foothills (12). Although evidence from this period is sketchy, and becomes more reliable the closer we reach to the present, it appears that the Protestant churches and religious societies, although never an overwhelming force, did exert more influence in the early American economy than later. If comparison is drawn with the rapidly expanding private sector, then it pales. But compared with government expenditure, albeit smaller in this period than subsequently, then it is highly significant.

Obscurely Goodchild (2000, p. 8) takes a swipe at management accountants, which will no doubt cause consternation at the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, and delight the other accountancy bodies who have escaped unscathed. This singling out is probably because of an association with the industrial system which is implicated in the apocalyptic vision, which includes environmental degradation.

Business may sometimes appear as surrogate religion. In Shaw's play, Major Barbara has joined the Salvation Army to minister to the poor and save souls. Her father is a rich and powerful arms manufacturer. His Gospel is that poverty is the greatest human evil, rather than, as with Saint Francis, a virtue to be embraced. Similarly Brendan Behan avers in *The Hostages*: "Pound notes is the best religion in the world." When Christ said that he must be about his Father's business (Christian Bible, New Testament: Luke, 2: 49), he may have had prophetic insight into the intimate connection of religion and business, not to mention prophecy and profits! Sometimes to do one may lead to the other: "Love your neighbour is not merely sound Christianity, it is good business." (*Observer, Sayings of the Week*, 1921).

GOD AND MAMMON

With churches in the middle of business districts, such as Trinity Church in Wall Street, and the many churches in the City of London, it is not surprising to find God and Mammon interacting, including sharing language. The French sociologist, Auguste Comte, writing in the early 19th century, saw one type of society dying, while another was being born. Dying was the theological and military; ascending was the scientific and industrial (in the wider sense, to include business people, managers and financiers). The religion of humanity, to which Comte wished to move society, was one in which man as the Supreme Being becomes the object of love and worship. By this he meant the best man has achieved. Comte readily reciprocated terminology between the sacred and secular, and the Pantheon in Paris accords with his vision of the Supreme Being of human achievement, with industry and science pre-eminent.

Religious metaphor continues to be used in the world of business, despite the possibility that we live in a secular or post-religious society. In the skewed prognostication of one of the classic advocates of the secular city:

... secularization liberates man for work by emptying work of the almost neurotic compulsiveness and the religious mystery in which it has been

enshrouded in Western society since the monastic period and the Reformation. (Cox, 1968, p. 200)

Another commentator on secularisation indicates the need for there to be a two-way flow whereby Christians in a technological and industrialized society need to take account of the language that such a society generates (van Buren, 1968, p. 26–27). Anticipating the round of privatizations in the Thatcher era (Vinten, 1992), we have the suggestion that there has been a privatization of the religious sphere (Winter, 1962, p. 155–166). According to this, religious faith and practice became a privatized sphere of American life – a sphere preoccupied with the emotional balance of the membership, the nurture of children, and the preservation of a harmonious residential milieu (Winter, 1962, p. 158–9).

The situation in the Far East is more fertile territory for the cross-fertilisation of the worlds of business and religion. Weber (1964, p. 229–30) asserted that the Chinese tendency toward harmony with nature and society reduces tension between religion and world to an absolute minimum (Ching, 1993, p. 229–30) provides us with our bearings in Far Eastern culture:

Comparing the situation in China to the more overtly religious climate of both ritual worship and communal identification in present-day India, we have to answer Yes, that religion is less central to Chinese society and culture than it is to the Hindu, or the Muslim. But compared to the more secular or pluralist scene in Western Europe or North America, we find in China a tendency that is also at work in the West. We find a tendency toward secularisation that does not exclude religion, that accepts a multiplicity of religious faiths and practices, and that harmonises these with a humanism called liberal as well as secular.

Civil religion is the religious or quasi-religious regard for civic values and traditions marked by feasts, rituals, dogmas and creeds. In the American situation with the shared beliefs of Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism we have a religions of nationalism with its creed, catechism and dogma to be observed in symbols of civil unity such as the flag, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Washington's Farewell and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Addresses, with the Pledge of Allegiance a standard rite for school children. (Bellah & Hammond, 1980). Civil religion also explains the incidence of religious language within the world of business. A linkage with religious symbolism is made by (Olins, 198, p. 9):

Identity is expressed in the names, symbols, logos, colours and rites of passage which the organization uses to distinguish itself, its brands and its constituent companies. At one level, these serve the same purpose as

religious symbolism, chivalric heraldry or national flags and symbols: they encapsulate and make vivid a collective sense of belonging and purpose.

With Charles Handy's (1978) "Gods of Management" the choice of which to serve is between Zeus, the dynamic entrepreneur who rules his empire on snap decisions; Apollo, the god of order and bureaucracy; Athena, the goddess of crafts people, recognising only expertise as the basis of power and influence; and Dionysus, preferred by artists and professionals, those who owe little if any allegiance to a boss. Sir John Harvey-Jones (1989, p. 224–6) likens the role of non-executive director to Father Confessor:

The chairman of a company has a remarkably lonely existence. Even in the friendliest and most open of companies there are many subjects that he cannot discuss with his executive colleagues on the board... The Father Confessor role is an extremely valuable one, which it is a privilege to be able to extend; and in many cases it is not confined to helping the chairman.

Sir Roger Falk (1970), a past management guru, indicated that: "The Church, for example, may be said to be marketing a service, and it needs, possibly more urgently today than ever before, to go out and sell itself" (18). Discussing the problem of how best to train managers, he asserts:

The student of management literature might well start with Plato and Aristotle! The armed forces, the civil services, and the great religious organizations have all evolved their particular solutions to the problem, and business can look to their solutions with profit. But the purposes of these other organizations are very different from those of business, which must work out its own methods.' (181)

Even accountants seem to be involved in ritualistic rites, being referred to as the Priesthood of Industry (Matthews, Anderson & Edwards, 1998). Their activities have been compared to witchcraft (the essence of which is the possession of a parallel set of ideas, which co-exist with more advanced views of the world, physical and spiritual, and may even contradict them: accountants are attempting to reconcile modern financial rituals with a consciously outmoded world-view) and described as a secular sacrament (the deposit of a set of accounts is an outward and visible sign of accountability: for the magic to work, the rituals have to be validly performed) (Gambling, 1987). A social critique of accounting is entitled "Paper Prophets" (Tinker, 1985), and False Profits refers to BCCI (Truell & Gurwin, 1993). Mary Bowerman and Iain Gray state:

The management letter provides a wealth of detail about the financial state of an authority, how well an authority is managed and the audit process itself. However, it has little impact on the way in which the local authority is managed and has become part of a mere ritual (*Financial Times*, August 10, 1999).

Pascale and Athos (1986) in their Seven S framework, based on work at McKinsey and Co., use the term superordinate goals to refer to the significant meanings or guiding concepts that an organisation imbues in its members. In the Japanese manifestation of the framework, there is no hesitation in referring to creeds and the Seven Spiritual Values of National Service through Industry, Fairness, Harmony and Cooperation, Struggle for Betterment, Courtesy and Humility, Adjustment and Assimilation, and Gratitude. When the ex McKinseyite, the now Sir John Banham, became the first Controller of the Audit Commission, he immediately operationalised the framework, but instead of superordinate goals, he substituted vision. When auditors start to have visions, start to wonder if the last days are upon us!

The Apostle of the American Gospel of Efficiency is reckoned to be Frederick W Taylor, who reduced factory tasks to their basic elements in his scientific management approach so that operatives could perform them in the most speedy and cost-effective way. However later:

The rejection of scientific management had provided scope for all kinds of theories of unscientific management and a resurgence of interest in spiritual development, new-age training, intuitive and creative thinking: IBM had even tried teaching its employees the Chinese rituals of I Ching. Californian-born ideas like 'organisational development' and 'personal growth' which had grown up in the sixties came back reinforced by new psychological evidence. (Sampson, 1996, p. 259)

SIN

Selling Sin is the intriguing title of Davidson (1996). The Cambridge Christian apologist, CS Lewis uncovered the locus of sin and evil in the mid 20th century, and accountants are undoubtedly implicated this:

I live in the Managerial Age, in a world of "Admin". The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid "dens of crime" that Dickens loved to paint. It is not even done in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices,

by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices. Hence, naturally enough, my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly nasty business concern.

Business can become idolatrous. Manufacturing industry in itself is not thereby condemned as producing the idols, although one wonders what the Divine view should be of the not inconsiderable manufacture and trade in religious icons, and opportunist exploitation of any sites where it is claimed miracles have taken place. The secular, contemporary version of idolatry is to uphold values which run counter to our basic humanity. The film "Wall Street" talks about ethical bypasses being fitted to the slick Manhattan traders, with the anti-hero virtually stripping the shirt off his father's back through the share-dealing which puts the quick buck before any humane consideration. Brawer (1998, p. 101–102) counsels the desirability of overcoming corporate gospel and the will to believe. Reengineering is presented as an example.

Such idolatry is readily identifiable in Caryl Churchill's play "Serious Money", which was performed in the Pit, the theatre-in-the-round in the Barbican Centre, London in 1987, the year of the Crash. Three female moneymakers, a British stockbroker, a Texan arbitrageur, and a Peruvian businesswoman, coincided in the City of London to indulge in ruthless double-dealing, with money absorbing all their time and energy, and with no time for love, sex, and certainly not for religion. Even the heroine Scilla Todd succumbs: "Zac, you're so charming. I'm almost as fond of you as I am of a Eurobond."

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

According to Sternberg (1994, p. 31–2), Marks and Spencer and IBM are businesses, while St. Paul's Cathedral is not. Yet there are business aspects to religions, even if they are not businesses. They are often similar to the voluntary or parts of the public sector, where business and management approaches are relevant. There are mergers and restructurings, and there was a hostile takeover bid from the Church of Scientology towards the National Association of Mental Health by infiltrating the membership and then trying to control an Annual General Meeting. It took expensive action in the High Court to overturn (Rolph, 1973).

Following the Cadbury Committee, the applicability of corporate governance needs to be considered. The Society of Friends has already addressed this:

Churches have traditionally been trusted to manage their own affairs with minimal supervision from the civil authorities. This self-regulation is, however, being called into question, as abuses come to light, and as bodies such as the Charity Commission take a closer interest in financial arrangements...So long as our standards of corporate integrity, as well as of personal probity, remain of the highest order we shall have nothing to fear from public interest in our financial arrangements.' (Religious Society of Friends, 1995)

Religions themselves need a licence to operate. Given the charitable status of many religious groups, and the accompanying tax breaks and hence loss to the government, there is an additional need for accountability.

A Christian group whose licence was revoked was the PTL Ministries under Jim Bakker and his wife Tammy (Tidwell, 1993). Jim managed the largest consumer mail fraud in US history, cheating some 150,000 out of \$158 million through selling fraudulent 'lifetime partnerships' in hotels. In October 1989 this tele-evangelist was sentenced to 45 years in prison, later reduced to 8 years. The ineffectiveness of the board of directors was seen in the appointment of Pastor Aimee Cortese even though she knew little about business. Church fraud is not new. The first prisoner in the Tower of London was Ranulf Flambard, Bishop of Durham, in 1101, who was arrested for selling religious favours.

Wookey (1996) points out the financial temptations with the non-accountable leaders of cults, who reflect the materialism of the age, and assert their authority over that of the Bible. Leaders live in luxury, with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's rumoured 26 to 90 Rolls-Royces, and L. Ron Hubbard's \$840 million reputedly left when he died. The ordinary member earns little. Money-making may be the founder's motivation in establishing the cult. Fraud is also not unknown with the Rev. Moon's imprisonment for eighteen years in 1984 for tax offences.

CONCLUSION

The accountant and auditor have undoubted roles to play in relation to religions as legally constituted organisations. S/he will assist in matters of corporate governance, management accounting, financial planning and much else. The production of a theology of accounting is an entirely different matter. Religious metaphor is common and may well enlighten discussion. However, it is really forcing it to suggest this will develop into a systematic theology. We have lived through many years of accountancy without one, and there would have to be compelling argument as to why one is now required and what it would look like.

Accounting is about conventions, models and balancing acts. These benefit some and dis-benefit others to varying degrees. Theologians, if they can understand the issues, may wish to comment, but this has no more significance than any other stakeholder comment. Those who believe otherwise must construct a taxonomy of accounting and theology and indicate how one should influence the other.

Hardy and Ballis (2005) give the game away when they still refer to accounting as secular, even though recognising that accounting can be helpful. Of course it can be just the opposite as one knows from the behavioural studies on accounting, and Gallhofer and Haslam (2004) would equally have to admit that accounting can just as well be enslaving than liberating. In a more literal sense there were accounts kept of slavery, and accounts are kept for organised crime and activities religions would generally regard as sinful.

Just because accounting is invoked by religions, does this make it per se religious and requiring a theology? Is it not preferable to regard it as secular, in the sense that it is a human invention? Of course it may be argued that God made humans and so everything is attributable to God ultimately. Why should God care about the inconclusive debate of yesteryear about inflation accounting, or the minutiae of detail about accounting for intellectual property? Where is the theological or religious interest about which absorption factor to use in management accounting? There is a justifiable division of labour. God created and then left humans to use their God-given brain to be inventive.

Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples are provide religious activity. It is stretching language to indicate that accountancy is similar. After all, the sewerage system is an important part of such religious buildings, but should one expect there to be a theology of sewerage? Leave that to the engineers and environmental scientists. Do not stretch language to breaking point, and recognise accounting for what it is – a human-derived artefact which is secular. This does not mean to say that occasionally something may crop up that is of religious significance or deserves religious comment, or that accountancy does not have a support role for religions. The DERC would seem to support such an approach. Accountancy also supports anti-religious forces, so it is not intrinsically religious or theological. Even religions do not always act in a religious fashion, with religious fraud, and here again accounting played a supportive role.

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