

Managing Religion: The Management of Christian Religious and Faith-Based Organizations

Also by Malcolm Torry

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Managing Religion: The Management of Christian Religious and Faith-Based Organizations

Volume 1: Internal Relationships

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*Dedicated to those religious and faith-based organizations in
which I have had the privilege to serve*

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Preface

Religion matters, and not just to religious people. Nations, and groups within nations, are defined by religion; conflicts between and within nations are partly driven by religion; and around the world, for millions of communities, and for individuals and households within those communities, religion defines their world view, their life projects, their daily behaviour, and their relationships with each other, with the wider society, and with the global community. There cannot be much that matters more than religion.

In some parts of the world it might look as if religion matters less than it did. Secularization in Western Europe, and increasingly in other parts of the world, is a complex set of social processes resulting in declining individual religious practice and in relationships between religious and other social institutions becoming more tenuous (Martin, 1978; Davie, 1994; Torry, 2005: 46–55, 2010: 1–21). Church attendance in Ireland dropped between 1998 and 2005, although it is difficult to say whether this means that falling attendance was due to additional pastimes becoming available (Hirschle, 2010), or to disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. In the United Kingdom, church attendance has fallen steadily for the last hundred years, with the rate of decline apparently unaffected by such major events as world wars. The failure of one generation to pass on religious practice and belief to the next appears to be the major factor. While the immigration of practising believers can mitigate decline in congregations towards which immigrant Christians gravitate, their intergenerational loss is the same as for the indigenous population (Crockett and Voas, 2006). Of equal interest are the results of research in the United States. These show that while Sunday attendance has remained quite stable (Presser and Chaves, 2007), attendance on a particular Sunday can be highly responsive to such factors as the weather (Iannaccone and Everton, 2004), and that month-to-month variation in church attendance has declined during the past 60 years (Olson and Beckworth, 2011). This latter finding means that congregational ‘fringes’ are dwindling, leaving larger proportions of regular attendees and of people who never attend. It is often from ‘fringe’ members that new committed members are drawn, either when life events provoke psychological change

or when a social space opens up in a congregation. The loss of the fringe does not bode well for future membership growth.

However, in other parts of the world, and also where secularization might seem deepest, as in such cosmopolitan cities as London, there are still plenty of religions, the number of congregations is growing, the number of adherents is growing, religion is well engaged with social institutions (including national governments), religion exhibits a deepening hold on communities' and individuals' world views (Davie, 2002; Martin, 2005), and religious activity can re-emerge in secularizing institutions (Grant, O'Neil and Stephens, 2003). Many religious organizations are not only coping with globalization but are positively thriving on it (Wuthnow, 2009). In some places,

religiously identified institutions can play social or political roles even when very few people believe or practice the religion that the institutions represent.

(Berger, 1999: 3)

In otherwise quite secular countries, governments and political parties will regard religious organizations as useful social partners.

To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.

(Berger, 1999: 3)

I live in Greenwich in south-east London. We have as many historic denomination congregations as there were 20 years ago. Some have declined in number, but some have increased, largely due to African Christian immigration. A major new religious factor is a hundreds-strong black-led Pentecostal congregation in what used to be a cinema in the centre of Woolwich, and another similar congregation is now growing opposite the old cinema. The Woolwich Mosque is too small for Friday prayers and for major festivals, and a sizeable extension will soon be open. All of these religious organizations, separately and together, are well engaged with the borough's community and with the borough's social institutions. Where there is a decline in numbers attending worship, it might be more a result of changing lifestyles than of a loss of adherents. Fortnightly attendance at Christian worship might now be more common than weekly attendance, so congregations look as if they are smaller than they were. Fewer infants are baptized, fewer people marry in church, and fewer families choose religious funeral services,

but there is more voluntary chaplaincy activity in the borough than there has ever been, and the churches' engagement with the Olympic and Paralympic Games was substantial.

At the level of the nation state, religion is as significant as it ever was. The French government takes a somewhat combative attitude (for instance, towards the wearing of the veil in public); in the United Kingdom the connection between the monarchy, the Church of England, and British culture is interesting, to say the least; and many civil and international conflicts continue to exhibit significant religious aspects, now less violently in Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, but more violently in Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and elsewhere. Some governments negotiate with faith communities. The UK government's long-standing and complex negotiations with faith communities relate to education policy, public morals, and the governance of religious organizations.

None of these governments are ignoring religion, and none of them are ignoring religious organizations. In the United Kingdom, the Charity Commission's recent engagement with faith communities over the governance of religious organizations has been a particularly clear example of the importance of religious and faith-based organizations to the government's engagement with faith communities.

In the first chapter of this book, I shall define religion in terms of its organizations. This is historically appropriate, sociologically appropriate (because we believe and behave religiously within religious organizations), and appropriate to the nature of the relationship between religion and wider society. It is not to put it too strongly to say that religion is religious organizations.

I conclude from this discussion that an important task for all of us, particularly for governments at every level, for policy analysts, and for faith communities, is to understand how religious organizations work, how they are governed, how they might be governed better, and how the relationships between religious and other organizations might be strengthened. It is in the service of these tasks that this book is written.

The character and structure of this book

A religious organization is an organization with worship at the heart of its activity, and a faith-based organization is an organization with a main purpose other than worship, but with some significant connection with a religious organization or tradition. Each religious or

faith-based organization will be managed in some way, in the sense that each one will contain people who organize activities, events, structures, and relationships. (We shall ask later whether ‘management’ and ‘manager’ are the best terms for this organizing activity in religious and faith-based organizations.) This book seeks to understand what religious and faith-based organizations are like, how they have been managed, how they are managed and how they ought to be managed, and, in particular, whether or not management theory developed in other organizational sectors might enhance an understanding of how religious and faith-based organizations might best be managed today.

The approach of this book therefore complements that of another author’s recent exploration of the relationship between the biblical text and management theory. Bruno Dyck, in his *Management and the Gospel*, discusses the relationship between Luke’s Gospel and the management of first- and twenty-first-century organizations. He is asking how an understanding of first-century secular organizations can inform interpretation of Luke’s Gospel, and how that interpretation can inform the management of secular organizations (Dyck, 2013). I am asking how both religious texts and secular management theory can inform the management of religious and faith-based organizations.

My *Managing God’s Business*, published in 2005, studied religious and faith-based organizations as generic categories. While most of the organizations studied were Christian or Jewish (because the majority of research literature in English, and perhaps more generally, relates to organizations of those two religions) (Harris and Torry, 2000), organizations belonging to other religious traditions were studied where relevant research literature could be found. In this book, I study only Christian organizations. There are two reasons for this:

1. There is no such thing as generic religion: there are only religions, in the plural. If the concept of ‘religion’ (without a word preceding it to identify the particular religion in view) has any meaning at all, then it is as the description of a category of realities that share a variety of characteristics. The religious foundations of each religion are unique to that religion, so every religion is different from every other, not merely in relation to peripheral matters, but fundamentally. A religion’s religious foundations affect everything about it, including its organizations, both in general and in detail (Jeong, 2010). This means that we cannot assume that conclusions that we draw about the management of organizations attached to one religion will be relevant to organizations attached to another.

2. I am a Christian, and for nearly 40 years I have been intimately involved with Christian religious and faith-based organizations. I have some experience of multi-faith organizations, but I have only very limited experience of the organizations of any other faith. I can write with some knowledge about the management of Christian organizations, and of multi-faith organizations, but not with any certainty about the management of other kinds of religious organization.

It is because a book of this nature needs to be about the organizations of a particular religion that I hope that this will be the first of a series of several *Managing Religion* volumes, each one tackling the organizations of a particular religion.

This book is the first volume of *Managing Religion*. Following two introductory chapters, on the Christian religion and its organizations and on 'secular' management theory (the term that I use to refer to management theory developed in non-religious sectors), this volume tackles the internal structures and relationships of Christian religious organizations (story and culture; members, volunteers, and motivation; strategy; groups in congregations; governance; and clergy).

Every religion is shaped by its sacred texts, or scriptures, and every religion's organizations are shaped by them too. It is impossible to understand the activity of a religious organization without understanding how sacred texts have shaped both the religion and its organizations. For this reason, the first section of each chapter will be a discussion of passages from the Christian sacred text, the Bible. Texts will be drawn mainly from the New Testament, because the early Church gave birth to the New Testament books and granted them authority, and because those books in turn have been authoritative for the Church ever since then. Christians read the Jewish scriptures because these were Jesus' scriptures, they were the first Christians' scriptures, and they were therefore formative for both the early Church and the New Testament. We shall quote from the Jewish scriptures when they appear to be relevant to the discussion.

I shall be taking the New Testament books as largely historically accurate witnesses to the events of Jesus' life and to the life of the earliest Christian churches. No history comes without interpretation, of course, so when we read the gospels we are reading what the gospel writers chose to include, the way they ordered it, the links they created between the different passages, and the precise phrases that they used. Similarly, in this book, what I choose to quote, how I order it, and how I link it together will constitute my own interpretation of the biblical

material. My readers might like to read the passages that I quote, and also additional biblical material, and then draw their own conclusions.

Managing God's Business (Torry, 2005) studied a variety of characteristics of religious organizations and concluded that organizations in the 'religious organization' category have distinctive characteristics that set them apart from other kinds of organization. A similar conclusion was drawn in relation to faith-based organizations. Each chapter of this book, apart from the first two, will contain a second section that outlines a particular characteristic of religious or faith-based organizations and then asks how such organizations are managed in relation to that characteristic. Because voluntary organizations exhibit characteristics that are similar to those of religious and faith-based organizations, theory developed in the voluntary sector, and sometimes more generic organizational theory, will also be discussed in the second section of a chapter. Where differences between religious and voluntary organizations require different theories and practices then the differences will be discussed.

The third section of each chapter will be a discussion of some aspect of management theory developed in the private or public sectors. Religious organizations are organizations, so they will share some of the characteristics found among organizations in other sectors: but they will also exhibit distinctive characteristics not found, or not found in the same way, in other sectors; and some characteristics found in other sectors will not be found in religious organizations, or will not be found functioning in the same way. Much expertise in the management of organizations has been built up over many years in the private, public, and voluntary sectors, and some of that theory and practice might be helpful as we study how religious and faith-based organizations are managed and how they ought to be managed. So in the third section of each chapter, we shall study some aspects of management theory from another sector that might or might not be helpful in relation to the particular aspect of religious organizations under discussion. We shall then ask to what extent the example of management theory might help us to manage religious organizations, and how it might be adapted so that it coheres better with the particular characteristics of religious organizations and can therefore be more relevantly applied to those organizations' management. Sometimes this comparison material might be included in the third section of the chapter, and sometimes in a concluding section. (The sections on secular management theory in later chapters will tend to be shorter because some of the relevant theory will have been discussed in previous chapters.)

Following the conclusions section of each chapter, there will be a case study to earth aspects of the chapter's discussion. (The reader will find that the case studies will vary in style.)

By structuring each chapter in this way, I hope that we shall gain a better understanding of the characteristics, activity, and management of Christian religious and faith-based organizations; that we shall become more aware of the roots of the characteristics, activities, and managements of religious and faith-based organizations in the Christian religion's history as evidenced in its scriptures; that we shall develop a better understanding of how some aspects of management theory developed in other sectors might be adapted so as to be relevant to the management of Christian organizations; and in general that we shall be better equipped to manage Christian religious and faith-based organizations and to understand both how those organizations are managed and how they ought to be managed.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have contributed to the writing of this book. Professor Margaret Harris must come first in the list, as she did in the acknowledgements in *Managing God's Business: Religious and Faith-Based Organizations and Their Management*. In 1996, a conversation at the London School of Economics (LSE), in which both of us lamented the fact that leaders of both Jewish and Christian congregations were going to business school, thinking that that was where they would learn how to manage their organizations, led to a literature review that I wrote under Margaret's supervision: *Managing Religious and Faith-Based Organizations: A Guide to the Literature*, and then to the further research that led to *Managing God's Business: Religious and Faith-Based Organizations and Their Management*, published by Ashgate in 2005. Colin Rochester, Director of the Centre for Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Management at Roehampton University, invited me to join the Centre as an honorary research fellow and supervised the writing of *Managing God's Business*. I am still most grateful to Margaret, to Colin, to Sarah Lloyd and her colleagues at Ashgate, and to all of those who contributed to the research and writing that went into *Managing God's Business*. In relation to this book, I am particularly grateful to Colin Rochester for reading the text and making some most useful suggestions. All mistakes are, of course, entirely my fault.

Until the publication of this book, *Managing God's Business* remained, as far as I know, the only research-based textbook on the management of religious and faith-based organizations. A number of books and articles on aspects of the field have been published since 2005, so the book needed updating; but readers of *Managing God's Business* had also suggested that it contained more about religious and faith-based organizations than it did about their management, and that a further book concentrating on how religious and faith-based organizations are, and should be, managed might be helpful. Hence the current book, which sets off from where *Managing God's Business* ended up.

In the context of this book, I am most grateful to Dr James Sweeney for inviting me to join the Department of Pastoral and Social Studies at Heythrop College, London, as a visiting research fellow for two years, from 2010 to 2012; and again I must thank St John's College,

Cambridge, for hospitality while I used the Cambridge libraries. From 2011 to 2012, and again from last year, I have been Senior Visiting Fellow at the LSE, mainly researching the reform of the UK tax and benefits system, but also the management of religious and faith-based organizations. I am most grateful to Professor Hartley Dean and his colleagues for inviting me to research at the LSE. I am of course very grateful to Virginia Thorp and her colleagues at Palgrave Macmillan for their constant encouragement and for being wonderfully flexible as the project progressed.

I would like to thank the Bishop of Southwark for permission to undertake two large research projects at the same time; the clergy and officers of the Parish of East Greenwich for taking on additional responsibilities while I spent a day or more each week researching and writing this book (and especially the Rev'd Jeremy Fraser for taking on the co-ordinating role in the Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy for 18 months); the Institute for Voluntary Action Research at Birkbeck College, London, for inviting me to lead a seminar on some of the ideas in the final chapter; a former Bishop of Woolwich, the Rt. Rev'd Colin Buchanan, for permission to use the data that I employ in the case study in Chapter 3, and Maggie Barradell for help with sorting the data; the Rev'd Liz Newman, for inspiring new work on the size of congregations; Deborah Dukes, for work on the visits and interviews on which some of the case studies are based; all of those mentioned in the case studies for willingly giving their time to be visited or interviewed, for commenting on drafts, and for agreeing the final text; Dame Susan Morden's Charitable Trust for enabling me to employ Maggie Barradell; and the Church Commissioners, the M. B. Reckitt Trust, and a generous individual donor, who enabled me to employ Deborah Dukes.

I am most grateful to my wife Rebecca who has put up with me using my days off for research and writing.

While much of what you will find in this book is based on research literature and on researched case studies, a great deal is based on my own considerable experience of serving religious and faith-based organizations, so I would finally like to thank all of those people, whom I could not possibly count, with whom I have worked so happily in religious and faith-based organizations for nearly 40 years.

Notes on Sources

Biblical quotations

All biblical texts are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicized Edition, copyright ©1989, 1995, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

References to biblical passages give the book, chapter number, and verse numbers.

***Managing God's Business* (Torry, 2005)**

Managing God's Business, published by Ashgate in 2005, employed research literature to study the characteristics of religious and faith-based organizations. The current volume, *Managing Religion*, sets off from those characteristics. Sometimes a brief summary of the argument in *Managing God's Business* will be given, in which case *Managing God's Business* will be referenced thus: Torry, 2005. Sometimes research literature employed in *Managing God's Business* will be employed for a different purpose in *Managing Religion*, in which case *Managing God's Business* will not be referenced. The vast majority of material in *Managing Religion* is newly researched, and all of it is newly written.

Unreferenced material

Any material that is not otherwise referenced is based on the author's personal experience and research.

Notes on Terminology

Church/church

'Church', with a capital C, means the whole Christian Church across the centuries or at a particular time. 'church', with a lower case c, means a particular church in a particular place, and therefore means much the same as 'congregation'.

Pronouns for God

I have not found a satisfactory solution to the problem of the personal pronoun to be used of God. 'he' and 'she' represent male and female, which, while they express biological realities and much else, are still human constructs and so are not directly relatable to God except as a way of expressing the conviction that God is not less than personal. The Christian tradition has generally employed the masculine pronoun for God (and masculine pronouns used of God in biblical quotations have been left as masculine), but in this age of equality we ought not to privilege one gender in this way. I reject three current solutions to the problem: 's/he' draws attention to itself rather than to the idea that a sentence is attempting to convey; to use 'God' where a pronoun would be grammatically correct draws attention to the flawed grammar; and to use 'Godself' wherever a pronoun would be appropriate draws attention both to itself and to the flawed grammar. The solution that I have chosen is to rewrite sentences so that a pronoun is no longer required.

Minister, presbyter, priest, pastor

Christian churches will generally contain a variety of office-holders, and in particular someone charged with teaching the faith, with presiding at the sacraments, and with responsibility for pastoral care. In some Christian denominations that person will be ordained as a presbyter (or priest), and there will be a clear distinction between those so ordained and those not. In some other Christian denominations, and in independent churches, the boundaries might not be as clear, and a larger group of people might have the congregation's or the denomination's

permission to preside at the Lord's Supper (the Holy Communion, or the Eucharist), to preach, and to offer pastoral care. Unless the discussion is specifically about the threefold order of bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon, in this book I employ the term 'minister' for an officeholder with responsibility for preaching, presiding at the sacraments, and pastoral care.