

Chapter 3

Contemporary Application of Traditional Wisdom: Using the Torah, Bible, and Qur'an in Ethics Education

Susan S. Case

Case Western Reserve University, USA

J. Goosby Smith

Pepperdine University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how accumulated wisdom from the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Torah, Talmud, Bible, and Qur'an, provide many common codes for ethical behavior in business. Religiously derived ethics are relevant to management education because they form a source of our earliest ethical education, even for individuals unaffiliated with organized religion. When religious tension is increasing, such commonality can guide development of integrity within diverse groups of management students to confront and ethically resolve many moral challenges in the workplace. After examining similarities in these religions' conceptualization of marketplace integrity, the chapter compares religiously derived ethical behavior along the following dimensions: workplace ethics of employers and employees; mutual responsibility and dignity of work; environmental ethics and stewardship; ethics of buying selling, and usury; and social justice and social responsibility. The chapter concludes with implications, presenting ways management educators can provide contemporary applications of this traditional wisdom.

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INTRODUCTION

While scholars apply the teachings of Aristotle, Kant and others to organizational ethical dilemmas (James & Smith, 2007), they rarely examine how the world's religious teachers resolved analogous dilemmas. "They have failed to tap into the deep well of ancient, yet eternal values that most people absorb with their mother's milk, but are not taught to apply to the world of business" (Zinbarg, 2001, p. 168). Religion matters to business ethics because religion's moral precepts and narratives inform and shape the morality of a substantial portion of the population making business ethical decisions (Calkins, 2000). Since people have absorbed religious teachings—whether consciously or unconsciously—understanding Jewish, Christian, and Islamic wisdom enhances our knowledge of marketplace behavior (Kim, Fisher, & McCalman, 2009). Secular individuals also can learn from this accumulated wisdom, representing thousands of years of sustained efforts to build moral communities (Gill, 2001; Zinbarg, 2001). The sacred texts display considerable agreement on behavioral standards in the marketplace.

Living in the most religiously, racially, and ethnically varied citizenry in United States history, with an increasingly religiously diverse business environment, challenges ethical business leadership. We need venues to discuss religion, morality, and integrity, and their influence upon business leadership. However management research and education rarely address these organizational and societal "elephants under the rug." After decades of prosperity, financial scandals and economic crises abound. Management curricula must create leaders with integrity, capable of applying a religiously informed ethical lens to their beliefs and behaviors in an increasingly contentious world. We need leaders to demonstrate increased integrity and engage in ethically sound behavior.

Although more research is needed, the positive link between religious beliefs and ethical attitudes in the work place has been increasingly

documented (Kim, et al, 2009; Graafland, Kaptein, & van der Duijn Schouten, 2007; Brammer, Williams, & Zinkin, 2007; Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Longenecker, McKinney & Moore, 2004). Empirical research linking religion and ethical values as well as managerial attitudes, decision making, and socially responsible business conduct finds that more religiously inclined individuals tend to exhibit better decision-making in ethical contexts, are less accepting of questionable ethical behavior, and have a greater orientation to corporate social responsibility.

Graafland, et al. (2007) conducted an exploratory inductive study of twenty Dutch senior executives from different religious backgrounds providing evidence of religious beliefs increasing socially responsible business conduct. Brammer, et al. (2007) analyzed the relationship between individual religious affiliation, denomination, and attitudes toward corporate social responsibility using a cross-sectional database of over 17,000 individuals in 20 countries drawn from both Western and Eastern religions. Little difference occurred across denominations, but religious individuals, in general, had broader conceptions of business social responsibility than non-religious individuals especially in areas of poverty relief, human rights, community support, equal opportunity, environment stewardship, and going beyond the law's requirement.

Conroy and Emerson (2004) studied the role of religiosity and ethics curriculum on ethical attitudes in the U.S. Their sample consisted of 850 undergraduate and graduate students from one public and one Christian private university who all responded to twenty-five different ethical scenarios. Degree of religious affiliation was associated with higher ethical standards, but taking an ethics course had little impact on ethical behavior. In a questionnaire study of 1234 Christian, Catholic, and Jewish business managers and professionals on sixteen questionable business decisions, Longnecker, et al. (2004) found that individuals with moderate to high religious identity demon-

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