Religious experience lies at the core of the human journey for many people. The influences of spiritual belief ripple across society engulfing believers and nonbelievers alike. Individuals discover meaning and direction through an experience that they believe links them to a truth or presence that lies beyond the boundaries of nature. The religious experience grounds meaning in a chaotic natural world. It produces an anchor for purpose and morality because it arises from a supernatural domain beyond the reach of ordinary perceptions and the cognitions that humans employ to make sense of the world. This supernatural status gives this experience a unique position and privilege to guide human beings. This chapter discusses how people's religious experience can shape their understanding of good and evil. This religiously formed meaning profoundly influences the capacity of people and organizations to do evil. The chapter maps out the internal moral and religious logic of organizations that are anchored in the experience of holiness for their legitimacy. The inner moral logic illuminates how holy organizations evade external categorization as evil by annulling such external claims in their internal moral world.

The power of the religious domain grows from the experience of the Holy or Sacred as domains that remain inaccessible in mundane life. When a person experiences what Rudolph Otto calls this numinous domain, the contact transforms the person (Otto 1923). Living through the experience of the Holy directly or through contact with the bearers of supernatural truth (re)forms people’s identity and affiliation. These sacred intermediaries take on immense importance in the question of organizational evil. Most people have neither the time nor gifts to encounter the Holy. This chapter, however, identifies a wide range of relationships that demarcate those who serve as contacts or intermediaries with the sacred. I use the word cleric to describe this diverse group that can range across shamans, oracles, soothsayers, prophets, monks, nuns, anchorites, priests, deacons, elders, scribes, preachers, holy men, imams and others. The concept
cleric covers the religiously and morally privileged individuals who speak on behalf of or bring to people the experience or truths of the Holy.

The experience of holiness for people can be central for organizational evil. To the extent persons believe that the experience of the Holy, Sacred or Divine reveals truths that exist beyond nature and reason, the purity and power of the experience of the Holy morph into an extraordinarily potent source of authority. The experience of the Holy makes sense of the world by dividing it into what Mercia Eliade called the “Sacred” and the “Profane” (Eliade 1987). This division comprehends the nature of evil and produces institutions and people who define good and evil and guide people in engaging them.

The ineffable experience of the Holy can evolve into religion and generate organizations. The development of religion grounded in sacred truth and experience of mystery provides an unfathomable and warranted source of meaning and authority. A sacred experience can lead people to establish holy institutions anchored in supernatural knowledge to define evil and good grounded in the experience of holiness. They provide justification or forgiveness for people who embark upon actions that people outside the religion might call morally evil. This chapter refers to evil in the secular and traditional moral sense of intended harm or destruction imposed by humans upon other beings or the world who are innocent in a moral sense (Adams & Balfour 2009). Traditional moral theory argues that evil actions depend upon intentionality and awareness of the impact. Adams and Balfour in their path-breaking study along with thinkers like Vaclav Havel and East European critics of totalitarianism argue that deepest danger with modern organizations lies in their ability to mask organizational evil through instrumental rationality that narrows or hides the moral nature of decisions (Havel 1987; Adams and Balfour, 2009). Sheldon Wolin pointed in a similar direction when he argued that politics and self-aware discussions over the nature of the political order and good became sublimated in the theory and practice of modern organizations (Wolin 2004). Organizations anchored in holy purpose pose a different challenge since they actively define evil and
justify actions for members to engage and eradicate evil in the world. Holiness can inspire crusades and
inquisitions to build a good world and eradicate evil.

In this chapter the words holy, sacred and divine elide into each other. Their meanings suggest
nuanced variations but grow from the same Indo-European roots and the experience of human beings with a
supernatural domain (Mallory 1997; Watkins 2000). This experience of a supernatural domain forms the
core encounter that floods human feeling and changes the human being. The chapter builds on the
experience of the Holy as described in Rudolph Otto’s classic study of the origin of religion (Otto 1923).
The word and domain of the Sacred extends this idea but also expresses the active principle that humans use
to extend holiness when they consecrate, bless or sanctify. Divine highlights the experiences that lead
humans to vest the holy and sacred in supernatural beings. At many points the three dwell together and will
be used interchangeably.

This chapter explores the nature of the Holy by examining the etymological roots that reveal
insights about the primordial human experience of the Holy. Building upon these insights and Otto’s study,
the chapter analyzes the different relationships people can develop with this primeval religious experience.
These relationships generate different patterns of authority and organization that shape organizational
morality when its members possess a privileged relation to holiness. This matters because holiness divides
the world and defines evil. The study concludes by discussing the organizational implications for power and
action that flow from drawing upon a sacred relation to the Holy.

The Idea of the Holy

The concept of the Holy derives from the old English Hali and old German Heilig, both suggest a sense of
wholeness or completeness. Another variation Haliq emphasizes separateness and points to a domain that
cannot be transgressed and is inviolate as a separate or complete domain. The deep Indo-European root
kailo emphasizes wholeness, health and good omens that bind together into a hallowed separate domain
The origins of Holy begin with otherworldly associations. The word points to an existence beyond the everyday natural world and beyond normal perceptions and apprehension. The Holy intimates a domain of reality that possesses stability and existence beyond and the bustle and change of daily life. Human reason and concepts cannot capture the essence of this realm.

The idea of the Holy carries immense importance for humans because of what Rudolph Otto called its “numinous” quality; the experience exits beyond reason and floods human consciousness and changes a person's sense of self. Otto coined the term mysterium tremendum to describe the sense that humans took away from their awareness of the Holy (Otto 1923). The Holy offered human beings access to a different realm. The holy presence induced a sense of being a creature before a higher world and provoked a sense of humility, submission and trembling before the numinous world. Holy was experienced as not only higher but the unpredictable luminosity inspired awe and fear. Ancient Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible and Koran all express this awe, adoration and subordination before the holy presence.

The Holy possesses a "Truth" beyond the comprehension of language. This numinous experience eludes apprehension in conceptual or ethical terms, and all attempts to articulate the truth remain incomplete. The transcendent nature of the Holy means that the domain of holiness remains obscure and unpredictable and ultimately non verifiable except as fragmentary insights from humans who touch it. Awe, fear, trembling before the immensity of the Holy ground this new identity for a human facing the luminous power and demands humble surrender before it. This experience offers immunity from the vicissitudes of life and offers human beings meaning and a different way of being in the world. The self can be anchored in truth and purpose guaranteed by insight from beyond the natural and rational.

The Holy conjoins with the Sacred as another aspect of this domain. The Indo-European root Sak or Sak-ro emphasizes separateness but one set-aside for the gods. Sak and its derivations point to how aspects of life can be consecrated or sacrificed or express how the holy presence shines through. It can identify the holy or sacred presence at a place or time (Watkins 2000; Mallory 1997). The concepts of the holy and the
sacred unify the awareness of a domain of life that is separate, whole and bound together (Chambers 2000; Mallory 1997). The roots of language and pervasive cultural data suggest this experience lies at the core of religious experience of life.

The ethical importance of the Holy and Sacred lies in their ability to complete and make sense of life. Because the Holy defies explanation but remains above and beyond the mundane, it provides the possibility of knowledge and truth that endure amid change and give meaning and direction to life. The luminous nature of the mysterium tremendum offers stability and clarity if it can be discovered and known in a world of infinite flux and death.

The autonomy of the Holy makes it unpredictable but also divides the world. The world of the Sacred and Holy define a domain of higher existence and enduring truth and purity to which the natural world cannot attain or even aspire. The existence of the Holy and Sacred changes the status of nature. In Eliade's words, it becomes "profane" compared to the sacred. Its root Sak means separate and set aside for the gods. One does not so much learn to be holy, but rather people live a process by which they are transformed by contact with the Holy or Sacred. The natural world resembles one seen darkly through a mirror as Saint Paul suggests after he was struck dumb on the road to Damascus. Plato argues that life resembles a world of shadows in a cave reflected by fire. This shadow world fades to insignificance when a person escapes the cave into the blinding light of the truth. Moses discovers a blinding, burning bush that transforms his knowledge. The stories, analogies and myths provide a consistent view of how the world of daily life pales in comparison to the exalted realm of the Holy and Sacred (Eliade 1987; Plato 1968; Genesis 1966; Acts of the Apostle 1966; 1Corinthians 1966).

This division into sacred and profane or holy and unholy has profound implications for living and ruling. It hints that life on earth possesses less meaning or importance than life in the domain of the Holy and Sacred. The two realms can lie side by side barely touching or entangle in a way that sacredness shines through constantly. The gods may venture down or influence existence, but the life on earth proceeds
largely independent of the *Holy*. This distinction cleaves the world and living can become a veil of tears, a fallen state or a sojourn for pilgrims seeking a higher state. This insight lies deep in the human conditions. Almost 4,000 years ago, the first great written work of human literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, recounts the quest of the great King Gilgamesh to escape the world and sorrows and attain immortality (Gilgamesh 2004). The world does not become evil or horrible, just less than perfect and incomplete. Often, however, holiness or sacredness seeps through into the mundane world. Holy places, signs and divine openings saturate the world. The *Sacred* can erupt into the world in unpredictable and disruptive ways as well as pervade it in a quiet or tranquil way (Eliade 1987; Otto 1923). The possibility of touching or discovering holiness permeates the world; one has to know how to look, how to discover and then face what to do with the knowledge imparted by being (trans)formed by sacredness.

**Relationships with the Holy**

The organizational and governing implications of the *Holy* or *Sacred* grow from the point of contact and what happens to individuals who touch the *Holy* or *Sacred*. Because the *Holy* remains supernatural, it is not usually accessible to everyone. On the other hand mundane and profane reality is shot through with *Holy* and *Sacred* openings. The key lies in how to discover or come into contact with them and the implications for living of this contact.

A person does not learn to be holy; a person is transformed in a deep emotional, cognitive and spiritual way by contact with the *Holy* (Otto 1923 Eliade 1987). This experiential foundation for religion and awareness poses the unique point of challenge for how holiness and sacredness influence organizations and governing. If the domain of holiness possesses a higher truth and a guide to a higher purer path, then connecting to the *Holy* or *Sacred* can engender legitimacy for people yearning for meaning or seeking an anchor for their place and way of life. Holiness can evolve into a strong source of ethical guidance and political legitimacy. The *mysterium tremendum* or the *Holy*, however, does not necessarily possess a strong ethical or political import. The religious impulse flowing from experience of the holy can just as easily lead
to quietism or withdrawal to exalt, contemplate or worship. It might lead to prayer or adoration but not necessarily to organization (Otto 1923).

The relation between human beings and the august realm of holiness flows in two directions. First, Holiness might descend to the person. Second, the human might seek out contact with the Holy. In the first case, the Holy or Sacred often erupts into the world. Holiness often visits people or pursues them. In some cases, it takes possession of them. The realm of holiness remains mysterious and can be wild and unpredictable, and this in itself can make it an unreliable foundation for organizational or governing consistency (Machinist 2003). In the second humans seek to tame holiness by devising ways to discover and formalize relations to it. In this section I will divide how Holiness contacts a person into three approaches: visitation, possession, signs and symbols.

**Visitation**

Divine visitation occurs in many ways. The Holy descends in dreams with coded messages. Holiness can descend when least aware as Buddha experienced beneath a tree. The Holy can speak to someone such as dictating to Mohammed or speaking to Abraham or talking to Moses. The Holy can stalk someone as Yahweh did Jeremiah through the streets of Jerusalem or the Furies sought Greeks or the Holy Spirit converges on a person. Visitations saturate life in the world, and a creature’s presence, a place or a tree can open to the essence of the Holy with a message. Natural signs abound, a person must be aware of them or trained to see them. The underlying reality here emphasizes the wildness and unpredictability of the Holy, so prophets or people privileged with divine visitation and insight can arise at any time and place (Machinist 2003; Brown 1997).

**Possession**

The Holy can take possession of a person. The sacred presence can fill a person or creature, and the person represents the incarnate divine or serves as a vessel for the word and insights of the sacred realm like a living god or oracle illustrated by the Pythian priestess at Delphi. If a person manifests as the avatar or surrogate
for the sacred on earth, this generates immense power and legitimacy for them in ruling or organizing.

Such a ruler or holy person embodies the living divine presence on earth. The actions of the Emperor God or divine right king or of the incarnated one inscribe the divine will onto the world (Potter 1997; Figgis 1965).

*Sign and Symbol*

The *Holy* remains ineffable, this is critical. Signs can provide a wide range of emanations or openings into the domain of holiness. People who are aware, and sometimes those caught unawares, can discover the holy domain in many places. The impulse to build altars to honor a visitation from an animal or nature spirit or to acknowledge the presence in a sacred tree, or grove or stream occurs constantly (Eliade 1987). These signs can evolve into a sacred place and can pervade a land or place with sacred import. This sacredness marks the land and settlement as divinely inspired and reinforces a people’s view of their place or as justified by the sacred grant. Sacred places can be co-opted by other religions over time (Brown 1997; Casey 1997).

The decision to build shrines or to acknowledge sacred presence nurtures the development of symbols to express the emotional, cognitive and spiritual importance of the truth emerging from the experience of the *Holy*. Most important for the exercise of ruling or organizational power becomes the development of written symbols or the need to set aside and protect holy places. The word, the *Logos*, is recorded by the privileged ones who are touched by the *Holy*. These insights come down as stories as in the ancient Vedas or collected oral traditions that become the basis sacred scriptures. But once the words of God, the truth of the *Holy*, produced divinely inspired scripture, the organizational importance of the *Holy* changed fundamentally.

Visitation, possession, signs all fuse in the divine word, the *logos*. Reciting or reading the scriptures became a moment of possible visitation. More importantly, the ability to read was not widely distributed, so access to the truth of the *Holy* now narrowed. In the wild and unpredictable world of visitations,
prophets and possession the Holy or Sacred could erupt anywhere any time without regard to status or literacy, but scriptures potentially changed the entire balance of connection and access and created an entirely different approach to the divine world (Machinist 2003; Rousseau 2010).

The other direction of the relation with the divine involves the active search of humans to connect to the Holy in a more predictable way. For this discussion I will examine five approaches: the quest, study and discipline, lineal descent, ritual or sacrifice, text. These approaches intensely influence organizing and ruling because they generate ritualized patterns or institutions to regularize relations to holy truth. This approach builds religion and fuse sacredness to organizations and authority.

**Quest**

In this path, humans do not wait for a visitation, but initiate a quest to find the Holy. Many cultures hand on prescribed methods of seeking the divine such as sojourns in places known to be full of sacred presence. Cultures develop rituals to cleanse and prepare for journeys or entering the divine presence. Other cultures create rituals of dance or ecstatic substances to embark on the quest. Humans change the direction and discover reliable paths or rituals to make a person receptive to the presence of the divine and holy. More importantly, this sets the stage for organizing and training people to seek holiness (Brown 1999; Rousseau 2010).

**Study and Discipline**

The quest to find divine presence leads easily to creating paths of study, training and discipline to ensure continuing access. This pattern can be as simple as becoming an apprentice with a master who has achieved communion with the Holy or can entail elaborate rituals and disciplined living. The relations become more formalized when a community forms around a master or saint and organizes a rule for monastic or communal life. The rules try to replicate the experience of the master or saint and sanctify the path of study and practice that helps others achieve the experience that makes them holy (Rule of Benedict 1986; Adolphson 2007; Nigg 1959). The rules pervade communal life to maximize the chance to encounter the
Holy presence. The community may produce initiation rites and stages of growth that require discipline, study and practice. Monastic or seminary rules harmonize and adapt to create knowledge but also create specialization to provide resources, security, and handing on of the path and knowledge. The imperative to maintain and hand on the sacred truths leads to systematic organizing with rules, rituals and authority. The organization guarantees the quality and precision of the path followed by novices, students and initiates (Kerr 2009; Nisha 1997; McMillan 1997).

The community rules establish a pattern of authority. The individuals who found the divine or been transformed by the holy presence assume privileges as teachers and leaders. The community grows as others seek the way to holy truth but also as disciples leave the community, seminary or monastery to spread the word and practice. Schools of thought and practice develop organized around the insights and learning of different masters, priests, sages or saints (Kerr 2009; McMillan 1997; Nisha 1997).

This clerical authority structure usurps options once widely distributed. Divine signs of nature and life may once have been open to the entire community. Now the interpretation of auguries and signs becomes the province of priests or holy members of the community. This specialization such as interpreting signs or dreams or sacrificing gives greater significance to the holy clerics who now become mediators between people and the divine (Rousseau 2010; Cole 2005).

This formalization is enhanced with the creation of sacred texts. A text-based spirituality summons forth far more organizational complexity. Two forces drive this. First, the existence of scriptures beyond oral tradition can drive the creation of a canon. The development of a canon narrows the wild and unpredictable prospect of visitation, signs and prophecy. The canon presses towards regularity and prescribed versions. Sacred texts highlight the importance of literacy that creates a barrier to finding truth. The institutions of writing, reading and record keeping become critical for communities driven to find and sustain a relationship with the Holy. Second, the scripture-driven spirituality opens up the world of interpretation and schools of thought. The essence of the Holy remains its ineffable and incomplete presence
in the world. Any word or concept will be incomplete in its apprehension of the divine. The ultimate elusiveness of words will lead to battles and clashes between schools of interpretation especially as texts prove elusive or reflect compound histories and traditions as the Vedas or Hebrew testaments. The battle over what books count as canon and differences between those who accept some and not other texts can set off different sects and endless conflict.

**Lineal Descent**

The political and religious world can depend upon blood descent and familial affiliation. The assumption that privileged access to the divine flows from blood affiliation easily influences the establishment of a clerical estate. The development of a Vedic caste system, the Hebrew priesthood descending from Levi or the early Christian insistence that Jesus must be a descendent of David’s line illustrates the strength of lineage and holiness. Some schools of Islamic interpretation depend heavily upon inherited privilege and access to scriptures; likewise the spirit may flow from one preacher to their children in evangelical Christianity. This familial claim allies with blood loyalty becomes a source of power and privilege as the family becomes a gatekeeper to the truth of text or revelation (Cole 2005).

**Ritual and Sacrifice**

The formalization of access to the divine presence and truth grows into discipline and practice. These often take on ritualized and sacrificial aspects. The rituals provide recurring patterns of action that have proven efficacy in achieving spiritual connection. The rituals often etch the pattern of sacred life into the everyday world. A sacred festival or ceremony will recreate and make present sacred actions or moments. The rituals memorialize and evoke the divine presence. The rituals, however, require training and practice to ensure they are done well and acolytes to prepare them. Ritual and ceremony require organizing to collect the resources, train people and ensure quality in their performance to evoke and sustain the divine relationship with the *Holy*. Often rituals and rites require the construction of holy spaces such as temples, churches, mosques or synagogues to provide the physical infrastructure for the divine (Rousseau 2010; Jones 1967).
The Holy and Sacred remain inextricably bound with the practice of sacrifice in human history. The sacrifice unites humans to the divine presence. Providing sacrifice solidifies the relation between the community and their Holy presence. The provision of sacrifice makes the sacrificed object holy and reinforces a relation. Sacrifices affirm both the surrender and relation to the divine presence. Sacrifices can supplicate or restore moral and relational equilibrium with the domain of holiness. The sacrifices accrete rituals to ensure that the sacrifice is worthy and acceptable because the sacrifice transforms the mundane into the sacred. Rituals govern the place, timing, and nature of the victim and the type of person who offers the sacrifice. The ritual sacrifice requires organization to train, gather resources and maintain the place for the sacrifice.

Text

I have already mentioned the central importance of text to all these relations with the sacred. The existence of text, literacy and routinized access to the logos sets off the true organizational revolution around holiness. The canonical text sanctioned as the emanation of divine knowledge in the world provides immense power and legitimacy to those who possess access to it and claim interpretative primacy over it. It breeds a class of people and interpretations that generate more rules that the text reveals in its stories of how to live in accord with the demand of holiness. The divine word proclaims the way of life and rules required to live up to the demands of the supernatural domain. Control and battles over control of the text and its meaning become primarily important for the organizational impact of the Holy.

The Divided World and Sacred Power

The emergence of organizations sanctioned and sanctified by a privileged relation to the sacred truth profoundly shapes the contour of administrative evil. This privileged access can occur in many ways such as visitation, possession, quest, sacrifice, study and discipline and text. The Holy presence divides the world into the aspects that support the quest for holiness and aspects that undermine it. This division creates an experiential and moral chasm between the holy and the profane. Some spiritual traditions so
enmesh the sacred and mundane that this division matters less, but the organizational patterns arise from the claims of individuals and groups to speak on behalf of the sacred truth, and they demarcate the world.

While some religious traditions retreat from the world or remain quietist, most holiness traditions spill into the mundane world with moral claims that impact ruling and daily life. This impact lurks in the division of the universe into two domains: Holy and Profane. This division impacts the moral status of creatures and nature because their position and worth can hinge upon their relation to the Holy. If they contribute or manifest holiness, they gain worthiness for those who see the sacred as the axis of value and worth in the world. To the extent people, creatures or nature are indifferent, their moral worth lessens but does not necessarily become a problem. If they are perceived as standing in the way of, rejecting or undermine holiness, they fall into a damning moral category of unholy and profane; they can be categorized as evil.

This divided world affects all assessments and delineates the boundaries of good and bad, right and wrong, holy and profane. This division lies behind the modern English concept of Evil. Evil is relatively recent in the Indo-European tradition. Its precursor Indo-European root *upelo* strongly suggests the idea of exceeding or transgressing proper limits. This fits well with the original sense of holiness and sacred as a realm apart that should not be violated. Middle and Old German applied the more recent cognate *yvil* indiscriminately to cover a wide array of bads, wrongs and harms. Only recently has evil emerged as a darker more morally commanding concept. The deeper Indo-European roots *uergh* saved what we call evil for the actions associated with criminal or vile being or malign presence. The idea points to the violation or transgression dimension of an evil act. Profoundly wrong or evil actions exceed bounds, violate codes and destroy the integrity or wholeness of a situation. Modern English usage sets evil against the sacred. The stories of the origin evil speak of individuals or gods intentionally violating the norms of sacred order that held together peace and community. In another vein Augustine and others argued that evil really
represented an absence of the good, and this imposes an obligation upon religious people to bring good into the void (Mallory 1997; Watkins 2000; Chambers 2000; Augustine 1986)

**Uniting Holy with Organizations**

This divided world and the boundary of holy and evil heightens the importance of the claim to speak on behalf of the *Holy*. If a person or institution gains the authority to articulate the truth of the divine presence, then that person or institution can define what is evil and what is not. Holy and evil arise against each other as defining axes of not only spiritual but also moral meaning. Evil as a concept unites worldly wrong with spiritual transgression, and the privilege to define it carries immense organizational and political import for the idea of organizational evil. If an organization derives its legitimacy and culture from this approach, it not only monopolizes definitions of evil but claims immunity from secular or other judgments about the evil of its own actions.

Evil takes on more importance when it becomes an active, intentional force. Demonic beings turn the world into a battlefield of forces of good against forces of evil. These demonic forces pose an incessant threat to efforts to be holy or create good. They can possess humans, take over spaces and tempt or seduce humans into following an unholy path. An active evil force reinforces the perception of the world as a battleground where protectors of holiness must be always on guard against the pull and glamour of evil. This approach militarizes holiness movements to gird for war against evil and puts even greater pressure upon them to attend to their own holiness and purity (Adolphson 2007; Nigg 1959; Tesfai 2010; Walzer 1965).

The holy domain usually is articulated as supernatural beings that possess a unique autonomy. While this domain can evolve into a formal religion with mature institutions, rituals, teachings, texts and doctrines, no dynamic forces it into the realm of political life. Governing institutions can remain autonomous even parallel to religious institutions. This relation between the state and sacred institution
impacts the ends of the state and the means of state power. The regime and the holy need not unite, but more often than not they collide, merge and conflict.

When the domains unite, the Holy can hallow the governing and the person of the ruler. More importantly when the holy domain bonds with organizational governing, this bond transforms law and authority. When holiness glosses state rule, the entire moral rubric of justification changes. The ends of the state, however pursued, combine the holy with the interests of the ruler. A sacred veneer covers ruling and organizations. To violate a law, not only becomes disobedience, but a sin. To disrespect the state, not only becomes disrespect, but a sacrilege. To disagree not only becomes dissent, but blasphemy. Fighting a war transforms into a holy sacrifice. The procedures of court and governance turn into sacraments and incarnations of the divine on earth. To punish a lawbreaker becomes administering god’s wrath upon the unholy. Legal processes turn into liturgical interpretations of divine decrees (Tesfai 2010; Adolphson 2007; Jones 1967).

Holy organizations raise the stakes very high for the notion of evil. The key lies in the ability of the clerics speaking on behalf of the Holy to define the evil. If the ruler merges with the divine as with a god/king or divine/emperor, no cognitive or spiritual space exists to dissent or question. When governing is hallowed by religion, then organizational actors do not have to worry about doing evil. The organization does not need to mask evil being done because the culture of justification builds upon a sacred purpose that saturates daily actions and identities. By definition, administrators engage evil by divine mandate. Their obedience to orders and their discretion are sanctified by prayer and religion. They become moral and spiritual duties. This unity of holy and organizational leaves no room to question or oppose the decisions of the ruler, because the ruler’s decisions manifest the divine will. Appointments to posts accrue by adherence to orthodoxy, and merit is construed by spiritual worthiness rather than technical expertise. The organizational culture creates a strong push to display orthodoxy in thought and action. This manifestation
of one’s holiness means that the organizational goals cannot be questioned. Organizational actions and procedures are consecrated, and the devout administrator must carry them out in their quest for holiness. The organizational logic of a holy organization can tend toward closure and insulation of its moral judgments.

The paradox remains that the domain of the Holy remains fundamentally unknowable and unpredictable. Spiritual insight has launched revolutions and remains continuously available in many forms such as visitation, descent, or textual interpretation. Seemingly monolithic religious cultures generate immense disagreement and battles over heresy and bring about persecutions and wars among their own kind. But to sustain religion and relations with the Holy require consistent ritual performance, resources, training, teaching as well as consistent control. The unpredictable world of the spirit needs a mundane bureaucracy and administrators to maintain its practices, hand them on to the next generation and maintain relations with the divine source of legitimacy (Davis 2006). This uneasy relation between the demands for consistency and predictability needed by all organizations and the untamed potential of the divine inform the dynamics of holy governing both within the holy and governing estate.

The sanctification of organizational action informs internal moral attitudes and expands the end of governing. Consecrated or devout governors increase their range of concern to guide and enforce the means to become holy in daily life (Potter 1997; Davis 2006). The holy state can intrude itself into daily actions to ensure the moral formation required for ordinary people to live achieve the discipline of being holy. Just as holiness can become an object of discipline and practice, the holy state can now enforce that discipline on its people to increase holiness in the world. The internal moral logic of holy organizations face three critical challenges where the organization must confront the possibility of evil and generate solutions: dissent, unbelievers and exoneration or forgiveness.

*Dissent*
The infusion of sacred purpose into governing organizations deeply alters the state organization’s relation to “others.” Once state purpose encompasses a sacred mandate to form the character of the ruled, then anyone who does not fit the religious norms becomes suspect. For instance, opposition and dissent within the governing and religious establishment takes on a different tone. What might be considered normal policy debate transmutes to heresy or unorthodoxy that evokes greater moral wrath and warrants harsher punishment. Internal inquisitions against heretics and the unorthodox can be unleashed resulting in ritualized castigation. Opposition equates with evil and warrants harsh actions or purges against dissenters. At the same time, the ineffable and unpredictable nature of the Holy opens up the constant potential for heterodoxy to come forward. Just as holiness can augment organizational power and narrow dissent, it can release new genii of opposition and debate (Anderson 2002).

Unbelievers

From inside the organization the dividing line of holy and evil extends to anyone not under the umbrella of the blessed or faithful. Anyone not committed to the path of holiness ordained by the uniting of governing and holiness becomes by definition potentially evil. Infidels or unbelievers are categorized as unholy and lie outside of the norms of required treatment for the devout. This characterization enormously increases the potential for organizations to unleash immense suffering upon infidels, but the infliction of pain is not masked or hidden rather it is experienced as conquering evil in the world. People may be infidel by ignorance or, worse, obduracy, but both fall beyond the scope of normal morality and could represent evil or threaten the holiness of the organization and its people. A world inhabited by active evil forces compounds the problem of unbelievers who may be controlled by or allies with the demonic. Holy administrators or soldiers do not need to worry about doing evil against the unbelievers because the unbelievers pose dangerous threats (Nigg 1959; Tesfai 2010).
The holy state, either a theocracy, divine ruler or consecrated by holy clerics, must deal with the nonbelievers in their midst. Because nonbelievers fall outside moral norms and can be evil, one clean solution is to exterminate them. A secular or traditional morality might call this genocide because it destroys humans who have done no harm to the ruler or others. The extermination, however, can be justified by the holy organization because unbelievers put themselves outside of the realm of holiness and may be either threats or unredeemable. Here is where so much secular or traditional evil can be done, but because the people destroyed are by holy edict evil, then genocide or extermination becomes a positive good within the organization’s moral logic. Extermination removes ungodliness or evil from the earth and makes the world more holy.

Another approach forces conversion. The conversation, forced or voluntary, has several advantages. It eliminates the unholy but also saves individuals from their infidelity and increases the holiness in the world. More than a few holy crusades across all religious traditions extend the range of the divine mandate by not only conquering the unholy but also forcibly converting them to a new way of life. The secular or moral evil would lie in violating people’s conscience bound beliefs by forcing them to live a way of life they abhor or find evil, but within the institutional intent, these unbelievers, either for ignorance or evil intent, lie outside normal moral categories and their conversion transmogrifies into a good.

Finally, holy governing can impose differential rights or treatment upon the infidels. Differential taxes or property rights, restrictions on participation in society can all be regulated and limited by religious status. This differential treatment avoids the costs of extermination or forced conversion but over time limits lives of those who keep their religious identity but suffer the daily erosion of position and freedom. In secular or traditional moral terms, this differential treatment violates conditions of fair and equal treatment before the law. Over time these punitive costs lead to either emigration or conversation or mark the unbelievers as possible targets of pogroms or inquisitions. The uniting of ruling and holy narrows internal
dissent and discussion and creates immense moral costs and differential treatment for anyone not linked to the tradition of holiness that pervades the ruling estate.

**Exoneration and Forgiveness**

Many religions generate sacred laws and rules that possess divine sanction and certainty. In a holy organization with absolute rules, administrators and soldiers may be called upon to violate these laws. The rules often emerge from sacred texts or revelation and possess great sacred moral weight. Administrators or warriors may be asked to violate the rules to achieve sacred goals, and they know their actions violate their own sacred laws. They know they commit evil and do not hide from this. The sacred estate, however, whether ruler or clerics, address this dilemma. It is important to remember that in this case the individuals accept responsibility for their decisions and evil actions, they neither hide from, mask or pretend what they do constitutes pure right. Holy organizations create rituals to provide forgiveness or exoneration for the warriors or administrators who perform the heinous acts. The forgiveness may require penance or atonement to restore moral balance. This sacred forgiveness or pardon permits religious orthodoxy to acknowledge objectively evil actions that violate sacred laws but enables organizations to exonerate the organizational actors who commit them.

This dynamic of merging holiness, organizations and ruling has many permutations but this analysis focuses upon two patterns. The first unites the ruler or ruling estate with the divine. The second mandates the clerics dominate the state in a theocracy. In the first, many rulers or families claim descent from god and create blood based sacred legitimacy for their lines. Divine emperors or divine right kings also make claims based on other grounds such as divinely sanctioned conquest, but all reflect a strategy to insulate the rulers from external religious claims or secular reasoned claims. This approach imbues rulers' actions with liturgical and sacred legitimacy. The force of divine writ supports the ruler’s commands. The unity of rule and sacred sanctifies state and human actions. Ascension to rule involves becoming divine as well as a ruler and requires worship as well as obedience. The ruler may be incarnate, visited or possessed, it hardly
matters given the apparatus and consequences. Elaborate theologies can be developed to explain the divine and human nature of the ruler (Kantorowicz 1957). The ruler does not need everyone to convert, just to worship or accede to the divine ruler. This solution simply abolishes the problem of organizational evil by making it impossible.

In the second relationship theocracy unites state and holy but places rule of the clerics at the center, and the state becomes an instrument of the clerisy. The key lies in the autonomous religious clerical estate. The clerics claim a monopoly on the rituals and teaching that maintain access to the divine presence. They control the sacrifices, the holy places, the training and discipline needed to acquire intimate familiarity of with the insights and truth of the Holy. This monopoly over truth and moral rectitude anchor their claims to control the direction of government. Their monopoly over interpreting the sacred texts augments this. Both approaches deny the applicability of human reason and concepts to critique their logic and pronouncements. They develop a legal system to apply the sacred mandates in to daily life. The clerics also maintain control over who is permitted to govern as gatekeepers. This widespread strategy is illustrated by Cromwell’s revolution of the saints or Calvinist regimes in Europe (Walzer 1982). Medieval Europe witnessed endless disputes over legitimate succession since the Roman Catholic Church claimed the right to sanction the ruler and crown the ruler (Keen 1987). While the medieval clerics never gained the level of control over the entire apparatus of governing that a theocracy requires, the Medieval church could depose rulers or incite rebellion among restless nobles by excommunicating rulers. The Pope could place an entire realm under interdiction that meant that the population could not receive sacraments and it released the bonds of fealty upon which feudal kings depended. The great Islamic caliphates experienced the same tensions.

A hallmark of a theocracy or strong holy organizations is the ability of the clerics to govern and judge themselves. This judicial independence grants the sacred estate autonomy that enables them to rule states through indirection. The modern Iranian state exhibits a very sophisticated modern form that unites
theocratic power with the apparatus of the modern rational state. The clerical estate monopolizes interpretation of the text, controls seminary training and the public education curriculum. It possesses a Guardian Council and Assembly of Experts to decide legal interpretations of the sacred text and Islamic law. The Islamic law and its adjudicators trump secular law. The clerical institutions screen the people allowed to run for election so that the government is constrained by the clerical interpretation of orthodoxy. Advancement in the bureaucracy and military is monitored by the clerics, and senior appointments are made by the Supreme Leader who is the supreme cleric appointed for life. Cleric-dominated foundations control the majority of the economy. The regime has evolved to the stage where the Supreme Leader no longer is the just final interpreter of the text, but is now regarded as God's surrogate or God's voice on earth (Shapera 2010; Cole 2005). The Iranian and other recent experiments demonstrate the capacity to meld the rational bureaucratic and technological state with orthodoxy grounded in the Holy (Tesfai 2010; Cole 2005).

Two dynamics influence these relationships between the holy and ruling estates. First, the clerical estate fights to control the definition of evil. All of the issues associated with organizational evil are resolved if either the ruler’s divine will or the clerics define evil and can exonerate violations of sacred laws. The clerics use their ability to delegitimize leaders to keep a tight rein on the aspiration of the rulers to establish an autonomous political domain (Wolin 2004; Machiavelli 1977). Second, the self-enclosed and self-enforcing monopoly on religious reality insulates the clerical estate from any effective accountability beyond itself. The monopoly on holiness expands to immunity from state or popular control. Quite predictably, this clerical impunity results in the erosion of the integrity of the clerics. The capacity of people to delude themselves and rationalize their interests as moral endeavors can be a powerful draw in self-insulated elites (Zimbardo 2007; Festinger 1987). It engenders hubris not only to be the interpreter of the divine will but also to dismiss all questioning as heresy or blasphemy. Power, wealth, unquestioned will, deference and the
ability to dismiss opposition to one’s will erode internal piety and undermine people’s belief. The monopoly motivates careerists to enter the organization to acquire power, and these mixed motives as well as arrogance and immunity combine to create organizations that develop strong self-interest and goal displacement while blind to their own limitations by the sacred mission (Downs 1967). To define evil as opposition to one’s will permits unquestioned organizational evil to occur under the guise of holy good.

Conclusion

Organizational evil matters because organizations possess power, durability and capacity to act at enormous scales. The achievements can involve evil, the intentional harm or destruction of human beings, creatures and nature that are morally innocent. The magnitude and scale of harm goes up as the quality and size of the organization grows, and the last century’s slaughters demonstrate the sustained capacity of organizations to unleash hellish consequences. The question of how organizations and the people within them develop so that they can do evil and live with themselves becomes extremely important. I suggest that it goes beyond Vaclav Havel’s concern that people subordinate their identity as rational tools of organizations, rather humans can willingly destroy secularly innocent people, creatures and nature when supported by the power of the Holy (Havel 1987).

I believe that the internal moral and cultural logical of organizations sustained by a relation to holiness exemplifies one way this can occur. The human experience of a domain of existence that Rudolph Otto identified as the Holy or numinous inspires humans from awe and ecstasy to subordinate themselves to pursue the supernatural domain and truth. Rather than being a tool, a person conceives or him or herself as a holy warrior devoted to a sacred cause sanctioned by clerics who articulate the mandates of the divine domain. The actions of these administrators, soldiers and clerics express their quest to become holy as they eradicate evil and build a more perfect and holy world.
The paradox of holy organizations and their capacity for evil actions lies in the need for organizations to build strong organizational cultures to flourish (Schein 2010; Wilson 1989; Collins 2004). An organizational culture exists when cultural norms frame individual’s relations, judgments and actions (Bolman and Deal 1997). A strong culture provides meaning and purpose for people in organizations and transforms organizations into communities of belief and practice (Weick 2005). The culture helps people make sense of their world, frames their judgments and builds in strong norms of authority and role (Weick 2005; Schein 2010). Good leaders and great organizations create strong cultures (Schein 2010; Collins 2004). The culture enables individuals to move from a relatively indifferent or compliance orientation to a commitment to the mission. This commitment increases morale, performance and adaptability (Senge 1990; Bolman and Deal 1997).

The sanctification of an organization achieves all the goals of a strong organizational culture. The sacred purpose strengthens the norms, rituals and commitments of people by making them liturgical actions with holy purpose. Holiness consecrates the dictates of organizational rationality and enables organizations to exploit the power of specialization, consistency, routine and resource allocation with a powerful parallel motivation to be holy, eradicate evil and perform one’s role in achieving divine purpose. This merges with the needs of a holy enterprise to enforce orthodoxy through consistency, goals, control, expertise and confirmation for members.

The ends and the means of an organization now are consecrated to a high spiritual and moral end. This motivates individuals and anchors their identity in a sacred purpose and place. Holy actors can expand the range of organizational attention into any aspect of life that the clerics deem necessary to achieve holiness or exterminate heresy or blasphemy. Holy organizations seek to address and control the frailties of life that profane the world and block the path to holiness. It keeps the organization on high alert against the wiles and depredations of active evil forces in the world. The normal daily routines are hallowed and
blessed, and mundane actions in organizations even of obscure specialists take on a moral luster of contributing to sacred ends. The internal moral logic of a holy organization, religious, state or economic, pulsates with a deep moral purpose and certainty (Davis 2006).

Anchoring an organization in the experience and authority of holiness buttresses its culture and moral purpose. It narrows internal dissent to terms of orthodoxy and requires vigilance by clerics to ensure purity and holiness among themselves but also among the people in organizations. This leads to incessant internal inquisitions and creates an unstable and uncertain dynamic. This incessant self-scrutiny breeds different independent power bases within holy organizations. At the same time, the organizational rhetoric and moral appraisal escalate and any differences or disagreements spiral to more intense moral and religious conflicts. This intensifies the stakes of any disputes because arguments involve holy and sacred stakes not just differences of opinion about policy, professional judgment or ways of living. It becomes very hard to negotiate with holy organizations when other groups are seen as unbelievers or evil. Contracts, treaties or agreements reduce to mere resting points in an endless conflict. Often only exhaustion will generate peace with such organizations.

The key lesson for the study of organizational evil is how holy organizations annul the issue of evil. This is not about evil being masked or misunderstood, but rather about an organization that possesses the legitimacy to define evil and escalate any conflict into rhetoric about good versus evil. The entire realm of nonbelievers pose unending challenges as unholy threats but also possible converts. The nonbelievers, however, exist in a moral category outside the range of holy rules and can be treated as such. Holy organizations return to the early origins of the concept of evil that encompassed a wide array of wrong and bad action. Now daily organizational life and mundane actions take on moral urgency because they have sacred significance while orthodoxy permeates the rituals of daily not just organizational life.

People in consecrated organizations rest assured in the belief that the mediators of the holy domain bless their actions. Even when institutional actors must violate sacred rules, clerics offer forgiveness,
exoneration or even heavenly rewards for this sacrifice, and they laud the moral risk for a greater holy aim.

Holy evil makes moral evil irrelevant to organizational life.

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