ABSTRACT. If a manager is evangelical, does it color the style he uses in his relationship with his subordinates? The paper sketches briefly the two familiar, historical ethical positions... the Protestant ethic and humanism and relates them to two styles of management. Then it points up the recent healthy growth of the evangelical movement, and the basic beliefs of evangelicals; then relates elements of these beliefs to the manager. A comparison of the three management ethics (Protestant, humanist, and evangelical) suggests some differences in the characteristics of managers who follow each ethic. There is increased evidence of the effect of the evangelical ethic in political, medical, and judicial life. Is it not logical to assume it is also affecting business and management?

Business ethics is a 'hot' topic. Numerous writers decry the inadequacy of ethics in business and offer suggestions and solutions. (Some of the more recent ones are: Beauchamp and Bowie, 1979; Sinetar, 1980; and Williams, 1980). This paper traces the root of business ethics problems to the ethical systems present in the culture as a whole. Indeed, it assumes that business ethics problems are the result of changing ethical systems in the U.S. over the past one hundred years.

The country was founded very firmly on a Judeo-Christian ethical system (the Protestant ethic). However, in recent decades an increasing number of Americans have been influenced to varying degrees by a non-Judeo-Christian ethic, called secular humanism. The business community is a highly visible arena for the conflict which has developed between 'old values' and 'new values'.

This paper suggests that in addition to the Protestant ethic and the humanism ethic, there is a third ethic rising (although probably not dominant). Many writers of different ethical persuasions predict that this developing ethic will strengthen with time. We will attempt then, to compare vestiges of the Protestant ethic and humanism to this third ethic, the evangelical ethic; then to apply all three ethics, particularly the third, to managers and their styles. If a manager is evangelical, does it color the style he uses in his relationship with his subordinates?

The first two sections in a brief, over-simplified way sketch the two more familiar historical ethical positions, and then relate them to two styles of management. The third section synthesizes these two ethical stances. These three sections together simply provide a foundation for a fuller exploration of the proposed third ethic. The fourth section points up the recent growth of the evangelical movement, while the fifth summarizes the basic beliefs of evangelicals. The last section attempts to relate elements of these beliefs to managers and their styles of leadership.

The Protestant ethic and management style

There were at least two ethical outgrowths of
the Renaissance. One was the Reformation. The reformers, particularly Calvin, were seeking a return to the infinite personal God who had spoken in the Bible. The Reformation, returning to the teaching of Scripture, stood for freedom and yet at the same time compelling absolute values. For example, the doctrine of ‘predestination’ holds that mankind consists of two broad classes, the ‘elect’ and the ‘damned’. God alone decrees in which class an individual belongs. The person can express or demonstrate only that he is a member of one of these classes. Adherents to the Protestant ethic had to determine conduct that was fundamentally and ideally what God would have it be... to do one’s job, to follow one’s profession, to succeed in one’s chosen career. Devotion and commitment to work were not merely ‘good business’; they were a sign of being among the elect.

The German sociologist Max Weber in ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’, outlined three main characteristics of the Protestant ethic: (1) economic rationality (the directing of all activity toward the making of money), (2) worldly asceticism (self-denial, or a distaste for personal indulgence), and (3) occupation as a calling (view of work as a spiritual end in itself). (Winter, 1979) This third characteristic is the extension of the doctrine of predestination in the example above. In like manner basic doctrinal positions were developed into relatively specific concepts which enhanced capitalism.

This strong character orientation came to the United States with the Pilgrims and Puritans from a Europe just beginning to experience the results of the Reformation. During the first hundred years of this country’s existence the Protestant ethic probably prevailed. However, since the work environment consisted of cottage industry and small retail and repair shops, its strength was not recognizable until the factory system developed in the late 1800s.

Frederick Taylor, an engineer, verbalized the results in his concept, ‘scientific management’. The human being was divided into two distinct parts, mind and body. (Rifkin, 1979) Taylor’s emphasis on efficiency was interpreted as concentration on man as body. The term ‘hands’ was often used to describe workers. Taylor helped secularize Calvin’s doctrine of unceasing work and specialized callings. Taylor designed his doctrine to better serve the new gods of the industrial age, the capitalist owners.

Weber’s concept of the best administrative system is strikingly analogous to that of Taylor. For both men, management or administration meant the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge. Both sought technical competence in managers who would lead by virtue of fact and not whim, by ability and not favoritism. (Wren, 1979) Both saw the manager as an authoritarian, at the extreme an autocrat. The pure autocrat confidently decides without consultation, then gives orders and expects them to be obeyed. He supervises closely and motivates through incentives and fear; subordinates generally react by doing only what is expected and by surpressing their frustrations. To the autocrat, the basis for legitimate leadership is formal authority. Thus, the development of close interpersonal relationships with subordinates is superfluous. He is task oriented and places little intrinsic value on showing consideration to subordinates. When such extreme tactics interfere with achievement, the authoritarian makes decisions and hard sells them to subordinates rather than giving orders. (Sisk, 1981)

Some benevolent authoritarian may be described as paternalistic implying that such persons play the role of a kind father caring for his children, showering them with gifts (employee benefits), and disciplining them when they get out of line. However, when this occurs the leader does not really respect subordinates and consequently does not treat them as mature, responsible adults. The predominance of the authoritarian style of management paralleled the height of the Protestant ethic, reigning from the late 1800s to possibly the 1920s.

The humanism ethic and management style

The other outgrowth of the Renaissance was the utopian dream of the Enlightenment lead by, among others, Voltaire. The humanistic elements of the Renaissance came to flood tide in the Enlightenment. Webster defines humanism