EVERYDAY RELIGION

Observing Modern Religious Lives

NANCY T. AMMERMAN

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EDITED BY

NANCY T. AMMERMAN

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Foreword

Peter L. Berger

Anthologies tend to be uneven. This one is not. It opens with pieces by three international stars of the sociology of religion—Nancy Ammerman from the United States (who also served as the convener and editor of the team of contributors), Grace Davie from Britain, and Enzo Pace from Italy. And each of the chapters following this opening salvo makes an excellent contribution to the topic of the volume: the way in which contemporary religion, refusing to be confined to formal religious institutions, penetrates everyday life. This is a book that should be of interest not only to academic scholars of religion but also to a much broader public in which there is today a growing interest in religion.

Much of the sociology of religion has dealt either with the aforementioned institutions—that is, broadly speaking, with the internal condition and the societal role of churches—or with survey data covering the beliefs and behavior of large populations. Obviously, both procedures have yielded important insights. But what both have in common is remoteness from much of what constitutes the reality of religion in the lives of many people.

Of course churches, synagogues, and other religious organizations continue to play an important role in contemporary society. But much of religious life takes place outside these institutional locales. To limit the study of religion to these locales would be like, say, studying politics by only looking at the activities of organized political parties. As far back as 1967, in his influential book *The Invisible Religion*, Thomas Luckmann insisted that sociologists must be attentive to religious phenomena that are "institutionally diffuse." Probably this has

always been the case. There is much evidence that even in the heyday of "Christendom," when supposedly the Catholic Church reigned supreme in Europe, there was a turbulent religious life outside the walls of the impressive Gothic cathedrals (the archives of the Inquisition provide some good evidence). But today this diffuse religiosity is particularly salient. In much of the world one finds more and more people who explicitly define their religious position as being at some distance from their background tradition—"I am Catholic, but . . ."—"I happen to be Jewish"—"I am not religious, but I am spiritual." Put differently, there is a lot of religion that cannot be studied by looking under "churches" in the Yellow Pages of the phone book.

Survey data on religion are also useful, especially if one can compare them over extended periods of time. But by their very nature surveys force respondents to make choices between categories designed by researchers who very commonly are remote from the social milieus of the respondents and consequently are prone to misinterpret the responses. For example, scales of "orthodoxy" often leave respondents baffled as to where they should place themselves. Also, people who fill out questionnaires have been known to fiddle with the facts. Thus it has been shown that, in regions of America where churchgoing has a positive status, people exaggerate their own church attendance. Conversely, in highly secularized Europe, people may understate their religious beliefs or practices. Survey data about a phenomenon as complex as religion give a very abstract picture—that is, a picture remote from the actual reality of people's lives.

As against these distortions, the present volume provides rich data on how religion is experienced by living human beings in their actual lives. Perhaps surprisingly, what emerges is a picture of great vitality and inventiveness. In addition to this valuable contribution, the volume also helps to develop a number of other central themes in the sociology of contemporary religion.

The demise of "secularization theory." Here is yet another nail in the coffin of the theory, dominant some decades ago, that equated modernity with a decline of religion. Or, in a somewhat more moderate form, it asserted that religion has become largely "privatized"—that is, has been forced from the public sphere and has become, so to speak, an activity carried on in private by consenting adults. To be sure, both secularization and privatization are empirically available phenomena, albeit very differently so in different countries and populations. But they are far less pervasive and progressive than previously assumed. Much of the contemporary world is full of powerful explosions of religious fervor, and much of this fervor has important social and political repercussions. The present volume provides evidence of both.

The importance of religious "pluralism"—that is, the coexistence of different forms of religious expression in the same social space under conditions of (more or less) civic peace. Again, this is something that has existed in earlier periods of history—for example, in the late Hellenistic era, along the Silk Road of central Asia, in Mogul India, in Hohenstaufen Sicily. But some basic features

of modernity have made pluralism a much more widespread, indeed global, phenomenon—urbanization and mass migration (making more and more people rub elbows with others holding different beliefs and practicing different lifestyles), the spread of literacy and higher education, the media of mass communication (from radio to television to the Internet)—all of these have made knowledge of alternate religious possibilities more generally available than ever before. This means, quite simply, that religion has increasingly become a matter of individual choice—what Robert Wuthnow has aptly called "patchwork religion." Individuals may indeed make "orthodox" or "fundamentalist" choices—many do—but these too are choices, lacking the taken-for-granted quality prevalent in much of earlier history and thus susceptible to later revisions. Again, the present volume contains rich data about the reality of religious pluralism.

Both secularization and pluralism have been unduly exaggerated by theories of modern religion. Often the exaggeration has to do with the social location of the theorists. Thus the theory of secularization referred to earlier has been a projection of the European situation to other parts of the world where it turns out to be inappropriate. Conversely, a recently formulated "new paradigm" in the sociology of religion, which centers on pluralism, inappropriately generalizes from the American experience, which is not replicated elsewhere in the same way. The comparison between Europe and America (more precisely, between Western and central Europe on one hand, and the United States on the other)—both containing societies in the vanguard of modernity—is of particular importance for the sociology of contemporary religion. This is yet another theme to which this volume contributes significantly.

The majority of the contributions deal with America. But there are very interesting discussions of religion in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, and Spain, and of the place of religion in what Peggy Levitt calls "transnationalism" (the increasingly widespread phenomenon of migrants moving back and forth between countries). Both the differences and the similarities of religion on the two sides of the Atlantic are important, and both contain secularity and pluralism, though in different mixes. Europe is more secularized, both in terms of the condition of its churches (Catholic as well as Protestant) and in terms of individual beliefs and practices. American churches are generally in better shape, and religious belief and practice is more robust (especially in the burgeoning community of evangelical Protestantism, which has no European analogue). But there are also important similarities, especially in the availability of pluralistic options—the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (who is not represented in the volume, but who has been a close collaborator with Grace Davie and Enzo Pace) has written about what she calls religious "bricolage"—loosely translatable as "tinkering," as when a child puts together and takes apart a Lego construction. This refers precisely to the phenomenon that Robert Wuthnow has called "patchwork religion."

Put simply, America is more religious, Europe more secularized. But both continents are confronted with the social and individual challenges of pluralism. Thus, indirectly, the comparison is very relevant to what the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt has called "alternate modernities." There is indeed a modern reality of secularity. But the United States provides a vibrant case of a society that is both thoroughly modern and strongly religious. This has interesting implications far beyond the Western world.

The chapters collected in this volume were originally presented at a conference convened by Nancy Ammerman and sponsored by the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University, supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts. As director of the Institute, I take great pleasure that the institute could be instrumental in helping to produce this volume. As Ammerman discusses in her concluding chapter, the volume also opens up a fascinating agenda of further research.

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Everyday Religion

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Introduction: Observing Religious Modern Lives

Nancy T. Ammerman

In the first century of sociology's history as a discipline, the reigning concern was explaining the emergence of the modern world. Theorists and researchers tried to understand the transformation of societies from tightly knit and relatively local villages into the complex, urban societies that were appearing then.[1] The cultural, political, and economic changes that came to be known as modernization have preoccupied the discipline, and from the beginning we have known that we could not understand those changes without also understanding what has happened to religion. In his brilliant analysis of the beginnings of modernity, Max Weber envisioned a trajectory from Calvinist shopkeepers to heartless capitalists:

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. . . . But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. . . . In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions. (Weber 1958, 181–82)

The story sociologists have told about religion in the modern world has been just such a story of mundane passions. Blind faith is replaced by reasoned investigation, eventually putting the magicians

and holy men out of business and eclipsing whatever sense of calling or tradition might have characterized an earlier age.

By the middle of the twentieth century, a few theorists had modified that view slightly to predict that particular religious traditions would disappear, while the functions of religion would remain in a variety of value- and meaning-generating social institutions.[2] But slowly, over the last quarter of the twentieth century, even that story began to lose its plausibility. It still made sense to the intellectuals whose own journey from village to academy it often described, but it increasingly made no sense of a world in which religious revolutions and spiritual movements abound.[3] In the United States, voters concerned about "values" and mobilized by conservative Christian congregations appear to have been a critical factor in electing one of their own to the White House. Throughout the world, in the highest tech sector of life—the Internet—religion rivals commerce and pornography for dominance. And religiously based conflicts continue to structure geopolitics, even as a global economy moves CDs and sneakers—along with Bibles and Muslim prayer rugs—into every corner of the world. Something is afoot at the beginning of the twenty-first century that many social scientists of the last century would have found hard to explain. Science, capitalism, and politics are pervasive and powerful in the everyday lives of ever-expanding layers of the world's population. But so is religion.

True, many of the historic places of worship are empty, and religious authorities have lost legal and cultural power in many parts of the world. Counting weekly attenders yields, in many places, a picture akin to the decline that was predicted. And asking people about their willingness to cede authority to religious functionaries—whether in doctrine or fertility—produces a similar secularizing picture. If the strength of religion is measured by orthodoxy of belief, regularity of attendance, and the ability of traditional religious institutions to enforce their norms, much of the world is very secular indeed.[4]

The signals, then, are very mixed. While a few social theorists still argue for an ever-narrower version of "secularization" as the inevitable direction of social, cultural, and economic development,[5] a broad search has begun for new ways to think about the relationship between religion and society. This book is a contribution toward understanding the seeming paradox of religion's simultaneous presence and absence in the modern world. While many in the academy assume that religion is declining or not there at all, commonsense observations suggest otherwise. That disjuncture suggests that it is time for new questions, ones that both emerge out of and begin to make sense of what we are observing.

This book is a series of "dispatches from the field." It began with an extraordinarily lively conversation, convened in Boston in November 2003. Each of the contributors to this book brought the insights and nagging questions that had accumulated in our years of observing religious people, and we began to help each other articulate new interpretive frames. We have since read each other's work, and many of the contributors have helped to shape the introduction

and conclusion to this book. More than many edited volumes, this really is a collaborative effort.

The chapters collected here attempt to let "everyday religion" raise critical questions about how we understand the role of religion in society. To start from the everyday is to privilege the experience of nonexperts, the people who do not make a living being religious or thinking and writing about religious ideas.[6] That does not mean that "official" ideas are never important, only that they are most interesting to us once they get used by someone other than a professional. Similarly, everyday implies the activity that happens outside organized religious events and institutions, but that does not mean that we discount the influence those institutions wield or that we neglect what happens within organized religion "every day." We are interested in all the ways in which nonexperts experience religion. Everyday religion may happen in both private and public life, among both privileged and nonprivileged people. It may have to do with mundane routines, but it may also have to do with the crises and special events that punctuate those routines. We are simply looking for the many ways religion may be interwoven with the lives of the people we have been observing.

In other words, each of us has found a place from which to enter (as much as any of us ever does) a particular corner of today's very diverse social world to see how religion is being lived there. Our work has positioned us in a variety of cultural and social locations, and those comparisons proved invaluable. We were also acutely aware of the absences in our midst. Most especially, this particular group cannot adequately bring the experiences of people of color into revisioning the sociological study of religion. We are keenly aware that many of the questions we raise may be seen differently in the Southern Hemisphere or by observers of African American culture, for instance. The vagaries of schedules and commitments produced a collection of contributors minus those crucial voices.

This book is a beginning, then, with many more questions to come. Given that religion seems to be a part of the social world we encounter today, we ask, what are its characteristics and dynamics? *How* does religion operate in the modern world? When and where do we find experiences that participants define as religious or spiritual? Where do we see symbols and assumptions that have spiritual dimensions, even if they are not overtly defined as such? Where are traditional religions present beyond their own institutional walls, and where are new religiosities gaining a foothold?

Rather than starting with a preexisting definition of religion, each of the contributors to this volume begins with questions grounded in the everyday ways modern persons relate to the things they experience as religious or spiritual. They ask what makes some social events and individual actions religious in the minds of the actors and how those definitions are shaped by the various cultural and institutional contexts in which they take place. We do not assume that religion is always about "eternal truths" that divide the saved and the

damned. Nor do we follow rational choice theorists in positing that religion is always about "supernatural rewards."[7] While these may be good descriptions of evangelical Christianity, our experience in the field suggests to us that religious social reality is bigger than that. Each of these chapters asks readers to take definitional cues from the wide range of mental, physical, emotional, political, and social realities that can fall within the realm of "religious" experience.

This theoretical and definitional expansion also implies an expansion in our modes of measurement. Our observations suggest that religion is bigger than the theological ideas and religious institutions about which typical surveys have inquired. Beliefs about the Bible and religious service attendance fail to capture much of the spiritual world we have heard about in the field. Many of these chapters suggest why we are skeptical about what the surveys have revealed; but we are also aware that nascent, less-institutionalized phenomena are not easy to define and analyze. We recognize the expedience and the utility of asking survey questions and employing statistical methods, so it is with some caution and humility that we begin to point to methodological alternatives. Still, these articles demonstrate the enormous gains to be made by giving attention to individual life stories, observations of groups in action, and analysis of societies at crisis moments and otherwise listening for the social patterns that emerge in everyday life.[8]

We are interested, then, in describing the social worlds in which religious ideas, practices, groups, and experiences make an appearance. We are interested in describing what religion itself looks like—that is, in developing better definitions and indicators. But we are also interested in what we might learn about the way religion works. This is a book about the *social* realities of everyday religious life. That means that we take the power of the social context seriously. The chapters here invite you to look with us for all the ways in which particular cultures and histories provide the materials out of which everyday religiosities and secularities emerge. The diverse European and American terrain they cover should also be seen as an invitation to think about the religiosities and secularities of the people of color and populations in the parts of the world not included among these dispatches.

Religiosities—plural—is, we would argue, the right word, wherever one is observing. Paying attention to everyday experience quickly explodes any assumption that religion is always (or ever) one thing, either for individuals or for groups. Theologians can certainly contend that a religious identity or membership is real only if it is singular and central for the person who holds it, but sociologists should not take that as the last word on what we analyze. Religion today is plural (and may always have been). Religious ideas and practices may be present even when they are neither theologically pure nor socially insulated.

That is, plurality and impurity do not lead to religious demise. Older models of secularization predicted that the existence of plural religious authorities would weaken the power of any one of them. Without an overarching shared

sacred world, religion would be subject to critical comparisons that would fundamentally change its nature.[9] Choice, in other words, would bring the elevation of individual autonomy over institutional authority and render religious groups impotent in the face of the preferences of their mobile and selective members. Because no religious tradition can define a taken-for-granted world, all religious traditions would suffer. Especially for Europeans, accustomed to links between religion and social solidarity, religious pluralism long seemed an implausible, perhaps even dangerous, experiment. The U.S. notion of individual religious choice and commitment seems to many Europeans a pale reflection of the powerful communal memory they have known.[10]

But a pluralism of religious institutions has been part of the American situation from the beginning. Historian Jon Butler has noted that by 1760, the degree of religious pluralism in the American colonies probably exceeded that in any single European society and equaled the pluralism found on the European continent as a whole (Butler 1990, 174). If the United States was religiously plural in its beginnings, it has become even more so since. Immigration has, in distinct spurts, added new kinds of religiosity to the mix, dramatically so since 1965. Internal migrations and religious innovation have contributed to American diversity, as well, producing everything from nineteenth-century Disciples of Christ and Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons to twentieth-century Pentecostalism, Scientology, and "storefront" churches.[11] The result is a bewildering array of religious alternatives. There are between 300,000 and 400,000 local congregations belonging to literally hundreds of different religious denominations and traditions.[12] Even traditions that originated in religiously homogeneous cultures elsewhere in the world have adopted American "denominational" styles, recognizing the legitimacy of the others around them (and by implication their own limited cultural power). By 1960, Roman Catholicism had found ways to live within American democratic pluralism, and in the 1990s Muslims in the United States began their own search for an American way.[13] As European churches officially disestablish, and as increasing religious pluralism becomes a reality on the Continent, chosen religiosities may enter the European religious vocabulary, as well.

Choice is simply present in all the vantage points from which we have been observing religion. This book does not question the power or reality of choice, but neither do we assume that people who choose or who mix and match are inherently "less" religious than those whose lives are shaped by a single religious trajectory in a homogeneous religious community. None of us disputes either the reality of pluralism or the way it alters the nature of religious institutional authority. What we do dispute is the notion that this necessarily constitutes a fundamental loss of religious presence or power. Each of us assumes that pluralism is simply a reality, that there are always multiple discourses and memories and histories—sacred and secular—available to be deployed in any given situation. Symbols and meanings from a variety of religious

(and nonreligious) traditions are available to modern individuals. Such "bricolage" or "hybridity" may be discouraged by some religious traditions and indeed may weaken the authority of any one of them, but it does not *necessarily* weaken the overall presence and influence of religious and spiritual factors in individual lives or in society as a whole.[14]

In saying that we take pluralism as a given, we are not saying that historic religious traditions and institutions should be ignored. Just because people have the power to choose does not mean that everyone will leave their old attachments behind. Existing habits and attachments have the considerable power of inertia in their favor. Studying religion today requires both an attentiveness to unconventional practices *and* an ear for the pervasiveness of traditions. In our observations, we have encountered both seekers and loyalists, dabblers and full-time devotees. We do not assume that simple forms of religiosity are on the way to becoming complex or that new ideas will replace old.[15] We are simply curious about the many ways in which new and old (often intermingled) appear in everyday religious lives.

Taking choice seriously, we should note, does not mean adopting a "rational choice" perspective. Most of this book's authors would agree with rational choice theorists that religious actors make decisions about religion in much the same way they make decisions about other aspects of their lives, and in many cases that means choosing the best the market has to offer, given what one is willing to invest. Most of us are skeptical, however, about the degree to which costs and rewards and market structures are the prime explanations for action, religious or otherwise. Rational choice models, with their macro-level survey statistics, have attempted to show that a religious free market, with active entrepreneurial suppliers, provides consumers with more opportunities to find their religious preferences served. The result of religious pluralism, then, is higher levels of membership and participation. Contrary to traditional secularization theories, rational choice theorists say religious pluralism is inherently good for religion.[16]

For the authors in this book, however, pluralism is neither a plus nor a minus, neither a guarantor of vitality nor a harbinger of doom. It is simply part of the cultural and structural world in which people are living their lives, a world that includes religious realities that are both old and new, powerful and fragile, institutionalized and emergent. We have no theoretical predispositions about pluralism beyond the expectation that people will engage in the construction of a social world for themselves that makes use of the cultural elements available to them. Asking what is available and how it is used allows us to see things we might not otherwise have seen.

What we have also noticed in our work is that religion has not stayed neatly in the privatized box to which earlier social theory relegated it.[17] Those cultural myths about the absence of religion in public life are not to be ignored, but they do not seem to provide an accurate picture of where and how religion is to be

found. Even when religion enjoys no legitimized regulative role, it may nevertheless exercise public power. As José Casanova has convincingly argued, disestablishment does not necessarily rob religion of its ability to have an impact on public policy: "Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them" (Casanova 1994, 5). From civil rights leaders to antiabortion activists, religious leaders continue to play a visible public role in the United States and around the world; religious congregations and special purpose groups actively mobilize political involvement; and individuals often link their political preferences to religious agendas.[18] As Casanova points out, the modern differentiation of spheres—public from private, state from church—neither determines the absolute power of one over the other nor prevents movement of ideas and influence from one to the other.

Not only is political life not always secularized, but other domains often exhibit spiritual influences, as well. The explorations in this book will provide a window on the degree to which the worlds of politics and work and health and family have failed to become spiritually neutral. That observation is situated in the more basic assertion that modern life is not as thoroughly compartmentalized as earlier theorists might have thought.[19] Indeed, one might just as well say that work and health are not politically neutral or that family and politics are not economically neutral. Each domain colors the other. The modern, "functional" notion that social institutions operate discretely has become increasingly implausible, and we carry that insight into our study of religion. We expect institutional boundaries to be permeable, and that allows us to ask how and to what effect.[20]

We have no interest in pretending that secular logics have no power or that there are no secular spaces in which religion is absent. The chapters in this book often highlight the ability of various forms of secular rationality to shape everyday interaction. We do not, however, assume that "religious" and "secular" are zero-sum realities tightly bounded against each other. We leave open the possibility that the boundaries between them are permeable. That theoretical openness allows us to see relationships that others might have ignored.

Everyday religion, then, may happen in unpredictable places. It may combine elements from multiple religious sources. It may be easily measured because its forms are widely recognized, or it may present itself to the observer as a question or puzzle whose meaning must be negotiated. Our task is both to engage that definitional negotiation and to see what we can learn after we do. As social scientists we are curious about what, but also about where and how and why. From royal funerals to funerals for aborted fetuses, we are curious about who participates and why. From home altars to televised liturgies, we are curious about the power and impulse to create something that is sacred. From "faith-based" organizations to Internet chat rooms, we are curious about where religion happens and how it mingles with other aspects of social life. Our curiosity took

us into a wide range of places—some predictable and some not—and what we saw began to teach us new ways to think about religion. This book is both about what we saw and about how we have come to think about it.

A Preview of What We Saw

Given that modern religion exists in a pluralist context, the first part of this volume is devoted to examining what that pluralism looks like and how it works. We travel to England and Sweden, Italy and Spain, as well as to many corners of the United States. In each case we find people engaged in a vigorous negotiation between old and new, using traditional symbols and inventing their own. Even the most apparently "secular" people often perpetuate (and re-create) religious traditions. Churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques play an important role in the way everyday religion is shaped, even for people who are not in them. Although traditional institutions are themselves being reshaped, it would distort the social reality we are describing to ignore their continuing power. Many observers of European religion have done just that, but neither Grace Davie nor Enzo Pace is convinced that European Christian institutions should be written off. Each describes the significant losses that have occurred over the last two generations, but each also finds surprisingly strong evidence for various forms of resilience.

Davie takes us on a voyage to explore the iceberg of vicarious religion that lurks beneath the tip of sparse church participation. Established religious traditions are still primary purveyors of rituals and symbols that mark the lives of individuals and communities, even those who only seldom participate. Although her study draws largely on European experience, others may recognize this "vicarious religion," as well. Religious symbols and rituals are culturally available both to frame predictable life events and to interpret unexpected tragedies. Even religious institutions that appear quite weak may nevertheless remain powerful producers of religious culture.

The populations of Italy and Spain are no less eager than English ones to construct religiosity their own way. They are no longer inclined to participate in confession, for instance, and the Church has therefore lost a powerful mechanism by which it offered routine moral guidance over everyday life. Pace notes that "the meanings Italian and Spanish Catholics attribute to their religion are . . . increasingly disconnected from the Church's moral authority." But that does not mean that Catholicism has disappeared as a cultural and political force in society. The Church is experimenting with new ways of communicating with the population, including the charismatic, media-oriented events that characterized the papacy of John Paul II. In addition, Christian identity is being used in new ways to mobilize political and cultural resistance. At the very moment that European Catholics are asserting an unprecedented freedom to

choose how and whether to engage in Church-sanctioned beliefs and practices, they are also confronted with non-Catholic "others" (especially Muslims) whose presence foregrounds their own historic Catholic identities. Pace asks us to think about the new ways in which religious and national identities are formed today.

While the long history of established religion in European societies sets them in contrast with the United States, these religious and cultural realignments may not be different in kind from the renegotiations found elsewhere on the globe. No population is religiously isolated, and few religious institutions can legally enforce moral sanctions. Yet in the midst of that enormous cultural openness, religious rituals and symbols, experiences and identities are being retained, borrowed, and remade. Our dispatches from Europe raise fascinating questions about whether and how traditional religions retain their power.

In the United States, the population that may most closely rival Europe in apparent secularity is the American Jewish community. And, as Lynn Davidman's chapter explores, American Jewish identities also retain something of the mix of religious and ethnic elements that an Italian Catholic might find natural. Even those who choose to leave behind traditional religious affiliation ("achieving" their religious or secular identity) claim their essential Jewishness (an "ascribed" identity). Many unsynagogued Jews shape their spiritual and ritual experimentation in distinctly Jewish ways, retaining elements of identification and practice—defined in their own ways. Davidman allows us to ask how traditions remain as points of reference, as sources from which symbols and practices are drawn. She especially suggests that we ask questions about the relationship between a religious tradition and its host culture. Everyday religion may be shaped as much by the everyday negotiations of living as a minority as by the institutions that seek to carry it forward.

That the United States remains a Protestant country is very clear to the Jews who live here, but it is also clear to people who pay attention to the narratives and symbols that shape our media culture. Lynn Schofield Clark turns our attention to television and film in the United States, while Mia Lövheim takes us into Internet discussions in Sweden. Clark and Lövheim both pay special attention to the religious practices of youth and to the way those practices are shaped by the structure of the medium within which they take place, but also by the symbols (and antisymbols) provided by the dominant religious culture. Religious traditions provide ways of talking about good and evil, even when the stories are "twice removed" into the world of fantasy. These youth have clearly not left their spiritual sensibilities behind, even as they often view "religion" as something intolerant, unattractive, and to be avoided. Existing religious traditions may not be able to enforce belief, but they often remain powerful producers of categories and symbols that shape the meanings these youth construct. As much as the Internet and broadcast media are global technologies, they also draw on individual and local religious work.

Each of these contributions makes clear that orthodoxy and strictness are by no means the only ways in which religion is present in modern society. Although some traditions thrive by constructing a subcultural enclave, others survive quite nicely without strict rules, high boundaries, or an enclave mentality.[21] Each suggests that vitality may lie as much in flexibility as in apparently unchanging truths. Somewhere between unfettered postmodern wandering and encapsulated communities lie the realities most of us are describing. Religious institutions and traditions have not disappeared. Rather, plural religious traditions and autonomous individual choosers have created a dynamic religious culture in which official and unofficial religious ideas and practices are shaped into everyday strategies of action.

Those everyday strategies take place not only across cultural and religious traditions but also across the multiple settings in which modern people create a life. We take as a given that work, family, politics, leisure, entertainment, education, local communities, nations, and a myriad other settings create shifting social contexts with various authorities, rules, and expectations. What we do not take as given is that religion is necessarily either absent or present in any one of modernity's multiple public and private contexts. The contributions in the second part of this volume take up the questions of whether and how religious and spiritual meanings and practices are crossing institutional boundaries.

The quintessential "modern" institution, of course, is the nation-state. And what Peggy Levitt demonstrates is that even these boundaries are increasingly permeable. Not only does international migration increase religious pluralism, but religious transnationalism alters the social space in which people live. For centuries, conquering armies have brought religion with them, and conquered peoples have devised modes of resistance. The reality of mixed-up religious traditions, born of cultural contact, is nothing new. But today's cultural and religious contact is about far more than either conquest or the occasional stranger or missionary. We encounter multiple religious traditions in any given location in the world, and migrants move among them multiple times over the span of a life. Migrants of all sorts bring new religious traditions into old neighborhoods; but they also remake their own traditions out of the experience of living across national boundaries. Peggy Levitt's report from the field describes the religious world of these transnational migrants. She writes, "In the twenty-first century, many people will belong to several societies and cultures at once, and they will use religion to do so." They will use symbols and practices to root themselves in more than one place at once, while each of those places will be altered by their transnational movement. Levitt's account provides us with our first glimpse of the way religion works in a world of multiple and overlapping identities.

Ziad Munson's work on the American pro-life movement has convinced him that many of the practices deployed by that movement are religious and political at the same time, that the experience of engaging in religious action in

a political context changes the layers of meaning available to participants across their lives. It may change how they view their church participation no less than it shapes how they view their political options. Symbols travel across institutional boundaries (although not always without contention), entering the narratives that shape action in a variety of spheres. Paul Lichterman's research participants, on the other hand, are not nearly so overt in their use of religious language to describe the voluntary civic work they do. Nevertheless, their subtle signals of mutual membership in a religious community establish a basis for communication and trust that shapes their volunteer activities while also suggesting the nature of their relationship with those they serve. Both of these chapters look at the constraints and the opportunities for religious presence in "public" activities in the United States and suggest the kinds of questions that might fruitfully enlarge the sociological conversation about the influence of religion on public life.

The influence of religion on the "private" sphere of gender and family has long been taken for granted, but John Bartkowski's chapter suggests that the nature of that relationship deserves the same careful examination we have given to religion's influence elsewhere. Even among conservative groups where gender and family norms are highly visible religious markers, the story is not a simple one. Rhetoric and practice are related in unpredictable ways. Expectations and practices are carried across multiple institutional lines—from business and politics to home and church and back again. No less than in politics or civic life, family and gender shape and are shaped by available religious vocabularies and practices.

A basic assumption of all these students of modern religion is that we need to take seriously both the ability of institutions to produce and enforce patterns of meaning and action and the ability of individuals and collectives to improvise and sustain alternatives. That is, we take both structure and agency as essential elements in any explanation for whether and how religion is present. Change, throughout history, has been born in the interstices where everyday practice goes beyond official dogma, making both the existing religious structures and the emerging practices worthy of our attention. We side neither with those who claim religion is declining because some existing institutions are in disarray nor with those who claim that religion is always best studied as an individual spiritual quest for meaning. The sociological study of religion remains concerned with the intersection of individual and institutional realities, and so the third part of this volume takes up the question of how spiritual and religious phenomena are identified, named, and collectively recognized and deployed.

In the United States, the intersection of institutionalized traditions and individual agency is also visible in a wide array of emerging settings in nearly every community. Kelly Besecke's chapter argues that small study and support

groups are only the beginning of the list of social contexts that have provided a space in which modern religious sensibilities are being sustained. Neither a "disenchanted" imposition of modern rationality on theology nor a literal assertion of faith over reason, the "reflexive spirituality" being practiced in those spaces allows groups of liberal believers to combine enchantment and uncertainty into a spiritually informed way to live.

Asking questions of structure and agency, of course, also implies questions of power. The negotiation between official religious authorities and everyday practice is often a contested one, and the contest often has to do with issues and practices surrounding the body. Meredith McGuire's chapter reminds us that everyday religious practices both use and address our physical bodies, and bodily practices seem often to stretch the limits of official tolerance. Embodied religious practices may represent paradigmatic sites of religious borrowing and innovation—and conflict.

The very definition of what constitutes religion is part of that conflict (cf. Beckford 2003). Some cultures and institutions powerfully discourage the presence of any apparently religious meanings or practices. By contrast, some religious groups claim exclusive authority over the symbols and narratives available to their participants. And individuals' definition of their own experiences may or may not be recognized as religious—either by the culture around them or by the scholars who study them. In the final dispatch from the field, Courtney Bender asks us to consider "Cathy," who describes her experience of meeting Jesus on an "astral plane" during a Reiki session. Should this be seen as a "private" or "individualized" religious experience? Each term in that label deserves a critical look. Why call it an "experience"? What makes it "religious"? And why do we (and Cathy) argue that it belongs to an individual person? How do such categories shape the boundaries of sociological investigations of the religious? Bender reminds us that scholars, too, are part of the social context in which religious meanings are contested.

No single powerful institution or culture defines the available range of religious beliefs and practices in the modern world. The study of religion, then, is a much more complicated (and interesting) matter than simply measuring a given set of ideas or counting places of worship and members. At the conclusion we return to the basic definitional and methodological questions that have emerged out of these studies. Given that religion has not disappeared, where should we be looking for it? And what should we be looking for? How can we best account for the multiple cultural materials out of which religious individuals and collectivities are constructing themselves? How can we recognize the religious and spiritual elements that may appear across institutional spheres? And how should we respond to the realities of power, including our own, in labeling anything "religious" or "not religious"? Recognizing both the cultural power of existing organizational actors, across social domains, and the agency of individuals and collectivities in negotiating everyday lives, this book offers

critical new perspectives on how modern religion is possible and how social scientists ought to study it.

NOTES

1. For the classic treatments of the contrasts between the traditional and the modern world, see Durkheim (1984), Weber (1947), Malinowski (1948), Marx (1963), and Freud ([1869] 1961).

2. This idea was first developed by Talcott Parsons (1951, 1964), followed by Bellah (1963) and then Luckmann (1967).

3. On this link between context and theory, see Warner (1991).

4. Grace Davie (2000) provides a very careful look at data from the European Values Survey, assessing what they do and do not tell us about the state of religion in Europe.

5. Frank Lechner (1991) makes a very cogent narrow argument, while Steve Bruce's (2002) arguments tend to dissolve into a "religion is weak, except where it is strong" scenario.

6. This reflection on the meaning of the everyday is shaped by the thinking of Norbert Elias ([1978] 1998).

7. Many theorists have identified religion's uniqueness as a promulgator of eternal truths. See, for example, Friedland and Alford (1991) on the "institutional logic" of religion and Alexander's (1992) assumption that all religions draw clear lines between the "saved and the damned." Stark (2001) makes similar assumptions about truth, but bases his definition on the ability of religion to provide rewards not otherwise available to human beings (cf., Stark and Finke, 2000).

8. Among the important recent contributions to the effort we are seeking to advance here are the articles collected in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion* (Spickard, Landres, and McGuire 2002).

9. This argument is brilliantly articulated by Berger (1969) and just as brilliantly recanted (Berger 1999).

10. This is at the heart of the dilemma analyzed by Hervieu-Léger (2000).

11. An increasing literature addresses the religions of the "new immigrants" (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Eck 2001; Warner and Wittner 1998). The history of urban black ("storefront") churches is described by, among others, McRoberts (2000) and Williams (1974).

12. There are no fully reliable numbers, but the reports compiled by the Glenmary Research Center provide reasonable estimates (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies 2002).

13. Sources on recent American Catholicism include Dillon (1999) and Burns (1992). On Islam in the United States, see Jane Smith (1999).

14. Gorski (2000), for instance, argues persuasively that the Reformation's breakup of the medieval Church led to far stronger religious institutions in each of the new Protestant territories.

15. That is, we do not envision anything resembling the "religious evolution" described by Bellah (1963). Such schemes seemed always to posit educated westerners as the "highest" form of whatever was being analyzed.

16. Two of the key statements on the positive effects of pluralism are offered by Iannaccone (1991), and Stark and Iannaccone (1994). An overview of the arguments is provided by Jelen (2002), and a concise summary of the U.S. case viewed through this lens is provided by Finke and Stark (1992). Much of the math on which these models have been based has now been discredited. On the methodological flaws, see Voas, Olson and Crockett (2002). And for a historical argument on why both sides are partly right, but mostly wrong, see Gorski (2000). We will return to the more fundamental flaws in this theory in the conclusion.

17. Lechner argues that the separation of institutional spheres is the core of modernization and that the influence of religion is always reduced in that bargain (Lechner 1991). This is at the heart of the lament voiced by Carter (1993) and Neuhaus (1984). On privatization, see also Hammond (1992). Gorski (2000) agrees that differentiation is the core of what secularization means, but skillfully shows why that has not always meant a diminution of religiosity.

18. See also my review of Demerath and Williams on the public "cultural power" of religion (Ammerman 1993), as well as their own analysis (Williams and Demerath 1991). The historical importance of religious ideas and organizations in mobilizing social movements is analyzed by Young (2002).

19. The implausibility of dividing "public" and "private" has been an important insight of the women's movement. See especially Fraser (1990) for a critique of earlier theories.

20. A more thorough theorizing of the permeability of institutional boundaries is contained in Ammerman (2003). I have also explored its implications for voluntary and charitable work (Ammerman 2005).

21. That "strictness" makes for organizational strength has been widely argued, in a variety of forms. See Iannaccone (1994), C. Smith (1998), Finke and Stark (1992), as well as Kelley (1977).

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PART I

Tradition Dislodged but Not Lost

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I

Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge

Grace Davie

My work in the sociology of religion has evolved over the past two decades in two rather different ways, each of which reflects critical changes in the nature of the field itself. The first concerns the canvas on which I have worked, which has widened steadily. I started my thinking with reference to the urban areas of Britain—more specifically with reference to the religious situation in Liverpool in the northwest of England (Ahern and Davie 1987). I then worked in more detail on the religious life of modern Britain (Davie 1994), in a book that explored both the beliefs and the practices of British people. In 2000, I published *Religion in Modern Europe*, which placed the British material within the European context where it rightly belongs. In terms of its patterns of religious life, Britain is essentially a northern European society, a point that resonates repeatedly in the paragraphs that follow—not least in the fact that northern Europe represents the part of the world in which the sociological study of religion began, and in which the questions about the place of religion in modern society were first explored.

Two years later, I had the opportunity to go further still—more specifically to begin the decentering of that world, an enterprise in which I (and the field itself) have been engaged ever since. In order to do this, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (2002) looks at Europe from the outside rather than from within. It does this through a series of non-European case studies (on the United States, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Philippines, and South Korea), asking in every case what was present in the religious situation in these parts of the world (almost all of them Christian) but not present in Europe. As

the canvas widens, the complexity of the relationships among religion, culture, politics, history, and biography begins to emerge.

At the same time, and indeed as part of the same enterprise, I have developed a range of conceptual tools in order to further my understanding of the subject matter in which I was interested. In the work on modern Britain, for example, the disjunction between "belief" and "belonging" became the dominant theme, an idea that was taken up in public as well as sociological discourse, generating both a substantial secondary literature and considerable debate.[1] The notion of "believing without belonging" has offered fruitful ways in which to understand the religious life of both Britain and other parts of Europe, not least the need to grasp the many interrelated dimensions that make up religious life (religion is not a single sociocultural reality). Ongoing reflection about the current situation, however, has led me to reconsider this relationship, utilizing, among other tools of analysis, the concept of "vicarious religion." It is this idea that will be explored in some depth in this chapter. More than anything else, it represents an increasing dissatisfaction with a way of thinking that almost by definition pulls apart the ideas of believing and belonging; it concentrates instead on the subtle and complex relationships that continue to exist between these two variables.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I will indicate (though not develop) a further mutation that is taking place in my thinking with regard to the changing patterns of religious life in modern Europe: a shift from "obligation" to "consumption" (i.e., a model based primarily on choice) as the principal motivation for religious activity—bearing in mind that at least in its early stages, this shift is entirely compatible with the continuing existence of vicarious religion, indeed it depends upon it. In the longer term, however, a rather different understanding of what it means to be religious is likely to emerge. The precise timing of these changes is complex and extends beyond the scope of this chapter. Happily the essential point lies elsewhere—in appreciating that the tools and concepts of social science must evolve as the realities themselves mutate. Indeed, many mistakes have been made in the sociological study of religion, as outworn concepts or theories are imposed onto subject matter that has clearly moved on but not always in the directions anticipated by earlier generations of scholars.

What Is Vicarious Religion?

What, then, do I mean by vicarious religion? The term has been coined in order to convey *the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing*. The first half of the definition is relatively

straightforward and reflects the everyday meaning of the term—that is to do something on behalf of someone else (hence the word *vicar*).[2] The second half is more controversial and is best explored by means of examples. Religion, it seems, can operate vicariously in a wide variety of ways:

- Churches and church leaders perform ritual on behalf of others;
- Church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others;
- Church leaders and churchgoers embody moral codes on behalf of others;
- Churches can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies.

Each of these propositions will be taken in turn in order to demonstrate the fruitfulness of looking at religion from this point of view. That is the task of the present section. The following section will deal with the methodological challenges that necessarily follow if the vicarious realities are taken seriously.

The least controversial of the preceding illustrations concerns the role of both churches and church leaders in conducting ritual on behalf of a wide variety of individuals and communities at critical points in their lives. The most obvious examples can be found in the continuing requests, even in a moderately secular society, for some sort of religious ritual at the time of a birth, of a marriage, and most of all at the time of a death. In many parts of Western Europe, though not in all,[3] the demand for the first two of these diminished sharply in the later decades of the twentieth century. The same is not true with respect to the churches' services at the time of a death. It is at this point, if no other, that most Europeans come into direct contact with their churches and would be deeply offended if their requests for a funeral were met with a rejection. A refusal to offer either a funeral liturgy or appropriate pastoral care would violate deeply held assumptions.

Exactly the same point can be made in a different way. In almost every country in Europe it is perfectly possible to have a secular ceremony at the time of a death; de facto, however, relatively few people do this.[4] Much more common is what might be termed a *mixed economy* funeral—that is, a liturgy in which the religious professional is present and the Christian structure maintained but filled with a variety of extraneous elements, including secular music or readings and, with increasing frequency, a eulogy rather than a homily. Princess Diana's funeral in September 1997 offers an excellent example. Churches maintain vicariously the rituals from which a larger population can draw when the occasion demands it, and while that population expects a certain freedom in ritual expression, it also expects the institutional structure to be kept firmly in place.

The need for freedom or innovation can be seen in other ways as well. In a rapidly changing society, new rituals emerge for new occasions, some of which remain controversial, and—for precisely that reason—outside the mainstream

of the church life. The churches' involvement in marking a gay marriage is an obvious example, but so too is a noticeable tendency on the part of some Christians to request a ceremony at the time of a divorce. Normally this is asked for by a partner who remains attached to the church after the divorce has taken place, and who argues that what began in the sight of God should end in the same way. Both cases, gay marriage and rituals for divorce, put a certain strain on the institution in that they challenge long-held assumptions about the Christian understanding of marriage and the theologies that underpin this. Both cases, moreover, highlight the degree to which portions of the population expect the church to be the repository of ritual, even when that means adapting to the new life-cycle realities that are part of modern societies.

But churches and church leaders do more than conduct ritual: they also believe on behalf of others. And the more senior or visible the role of the church leader, the more important it becomes that this is done properly. English bishops, for example, are rebuked (not least by the tabloid press) if they doubt in public; it is, after all, their "job" to believe. The most celebrated, and not in fact entirely justified, case of a "doubting bishop" in the Church of England was that of David Jenkins, bishop of Durham from 1984 to 1994. To a large extent the controversy turned on a frequently misquoted statement concerning the Resurrection. The phrase "*not* just a conjuring trick with bones" very quickly turned into precisely the opposite, for which the bishop was widely pilloried.[5] Much more interesting for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that it was much easier to gain a reputation as a doubting bishop than to lose it. The cultural expectation (on which there is no need for the press to comment) is that bishops believe. When they doubt, something quite clearly has gone amiss.

Similar pressures emerge with respect to behavioral codes: religious professionals, both local and national, are expected to uphold certain standards of behavior, not least, traditional representations of family life. People who are not themselves participants in church life want the church's representatives to embody a certain social and moral order, maintaining a way of living that has long since ceased to be the norm in the population as a whole. Failure leads to accusations of hypocrisy but also to expressions of disappointment.[6] Such expectations become at times unreasonable, particularly in relation to the partners and children of religious personnel; it is hardly surprising that vicarage families come under strain. The pressures on the Catholic priest are different, given the requirement of celibacy, but equally demanding.

A final possibility with respect to vicariousness develops this point further. It is also more provocative. Could it be that the churches offer space for debate regarding particular, and often controversial, topics that are difficult to address elsewhere in society? The current debate about homosexuality in the Anglican Communion offers a possible example, an interpretation encouraged by the intense media attention directed at this issue. Is this simply an internal debate

about senior clergy appointments in which different lobbies within the church are exerting pressure? Or is this one way in which society as a whole comes to terms with profound shifts in the moral climate?

If the latter is *not* true, it is hard to understand why so much attention is being paid to the churches in this respect. If it *is* true, sociological thinking must take this factor into account.[7] Either way, large sections of the British media are, it seems, wanting to both have their cake and to eat it: to point the spotlight at controversies within the church, while maintaining that religious institutions must, by their very nature, be marginal to society. Sociologists cannot afford to make a similar mistake. Such public attention demands that we understand how religious institutions matter even to those who appear not to be "participants" in them.

Vicariousness also prompts us to ask about the many ways in which populations and their religious institutions are related to each other. My initial thinking in this respect was prompted largely by the situation in the Nordic countries. A number of Nordic scholars have responded to the notion of believing without belonging by reversing the formula: the characteristic Nordic stance in terms of religion is to belong without believing.[8] Such scholars are entirely right in these observations. Nordic populations, for the most part, remain members of their Lutheran churches; they use them extensively for the occasional offices (including in this case baptism and marriage) and regard membership as part of national just as much as religious identity. More pertinently for the churches themselves, Nordic people continue to pay appreciable amounts of tax to their churches—resulting, among other things, in large numbers of religious professionals (not least musicians) and beautifully maintained buildings in even the tiniest village. The cultural aspects of religion are well cared for. This does not mean, of course, that Nordic populations attend their churches with any frequency or necessarily believe in the tenets of Lutheranism. Indeed, they appear on every comparative scale to be among the least believing and least practicing populations in the world.[9]

Two additional features of Europe's religious life lead in a similar direction—that is, to a better understanding of vicariousness. The first picks up a point already hinted at in the Nordic situation—that is, the symbolic importance of the church building both for the community of which it is part and, in many cases, for the wider public. Few Europeans attend their churches with any regularity; that is abundantly clear. Many more, however, protest strongly when a building is threatened with closure. The status quo is simply taken for granted until disturbed. Rather more subtle, but equally revealing in this connection, are the reactions of the wider public if they are asked to pay to enter a religious building. Worshiping communities, burdened by the maintenance of their buildings, often favor entry charges as a way both to generate income and to reduce the wear and tear caused by constant visitors. The wider public, in contrast, resent being asked for money on the grounds that such buildings, particularly those

that belong to the historic churches, are considered public rather than private space, to which everyone (believer or not) should have the right of access. They do not belong exclusively to those who use them regularly.

The role of church buildings as public spaces is seen in a very different way in those parts of Europe previously under communist control. In the years since 1989, considerable attention has been paid to the reconstruction, in both physical and constitutional terms, of the churches in countries where previously they had endured at best an ambiguous legal existence. This has proved a highly contentious topic. From something close to euphoria in the months immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall, moods have shifted to considerable disillusionment as the years wore on. Conflict, sometimes very bitter, has been part of the story as disputes about money and power have come to the fore. No one, however, has seriously suggested that the churches should not be there—hence the struggle to put them back despite the difficulties. To concentrate too much on the fact that in some, if not all, of the formerly communist countries churchgoing rates have fallen rather than risen is to miss the point.[10] The real questions lie elsewhere. *Why*, for example, are the churches so important that they are worth the all-too-evident effort to reestablish them?

One reason can be found perhaps in the crucial role of the churches in the moments just before the fall of the Wall. In many parts of Europe, a tiny and undoubtedly infiltrated worshiping community had maintained a protected if somewhat marginalized public space (including physical space), which became available to the population as a whole at the moment of need, and in which protest could become explicit rather than implicit (Martin 1996). In making this point, it is important to bear in mind the Lutheran as well as the Catholic countries dominated by communism until 1989—notably Estonia and East Germany. Both were and remain some of the most secular parts of the Continent. Yet even here the vicarious role was possible, the most notable example being the Nicolaikirche in Leipzig.[11] Vicariousness can, it seems, maintain itself on pretty slim resources, in the sense that religious institutions remained publicly available cultural and political resources, even in situations of considerable legal constraint. The much more visible role of the Catholic Church in Poland through the 1980s has, quite rightly caught the attention of a wide variety of observers (Casanova 1994; Osa 1996); it was not, however, the only way to proceed.

With this in mind, I am convinced that vicariousness still resonates in Europe in the early years of the twenty-first century and will do for the foreseeable future.[12] As a concept, it is both more penetrating and more accurate than believing without belonging.[13] It not only goes beyond a simple dichotomy but also points to the complex cultural and political histories that are likely to shape vicariousness in any given society. In the longer term, however, this concept—like its predecessor—may prove insufficient. A whole range of issues need to be

taken into account in this respect, not least an increasingly discernible mutation in the religious lives of Europeans—from what might be called a culture of obligation to one of consumption, a point to be developed later.

The Methodological Implications

Before doing so, it is important to look rather more systemically at the methodological implications of this way of working. Where, in other words, is the evidence for vicariousness, and *how* does it operate in European societies? Such a statement immediately brings to mind Peter Berger's (2002) contention that increasingly elaborate, supposedly scientific, methods constrain rather than enhance the sociological agenda. Is this true in the European case? Bearing in mind the regularity with which the relatively small churchgoing constituency is measured as if it were the totality of religion in Britain, there are times when I agree with Berger. Accounting for religion beyond the church pews will require that we "measure" in more subtle and creative ways.

One thing is certain: you cannot *count* vicarious religion. Hence its relative invisibility to those who use primarily quantitative methodologies. It *is* true that ever more sophisticated survey techniques indicate right across Europe a growing mismatch between what might be considered the "hard" and the "soft" indicators of religious life—both in terms of activity (the regular attender versus the nominal member) and in terms of belief (the believer in the creedal statements of the Christian, or indeed any other, church versus the acceptance that there is probably some sort of God or spirit but nothing very specific). It was these disjunctions in the data that led to the questions about believing and belonging in the first place. In statistical terms, it is very much harder to gain a purchase on the elusive but continuing relationship between these two variables, except to note this is far from straightforward.

An illustration from the findings emerging from the most recent investigations of the European Values Study will illustrate the point.[14] In those parts of Europe where the historic church remains relatively strong (Poland, Ireland, and Italy offer good examples), there is relatively little change in traditional patterns of religious life—that is, those which indicate that older people are more religious than the young in terms of both belief and practice. In these countries, the institution is still able to discipline the beliefs and behavior of significant sections of the population. Hence the corresponding tendency to rebel among young people. But in the parts of Europe where the institutional church is weak, something rather different is beginning to occur. Two variables in particular—a belief in an immanent as opposed to a transcendent God (a God in me), and a conviction that life continues after death—reveal markedly higher levels of assent among *younger* generations than among the *old*, exactly

the reverse of what might be expected. It is still too soon to know whether these shifts are likely to be permanent, but their simultaneous appearance across many parts of Europe at the very least invites reflection. One explanation lies in the possibility that the relationship between at least some measures of belief and belonging might be inverse rather than direct. In other words, as the latter declines, the former increase but in innovative ways—new possibilities open up for newly liberated believers.

In order to grasp the real nature of vicarious religion, however, altogether different approaches are required. Here an iceberg may provide a helpful analogy. It is easy enough both to measure and to take note of the part of the iceberg that emerges from the water. But this is to ignore the mass underneath, which is invisible for most of the time—but without which the visible part would not be there at all. How, though, can a sociologist penetrate more deeply in order to understand what is going on beneath the surface?

One way is to observe societies at particular moments in their evolution when "normal" ways of living are, for one reason or another, suspended and something far more instinctive comes to the fore: under pressure, the implicit becomes explicit. Sweden, once again, offers an excellent example in the population's reactions to the sinking in 1994 of the Baltic ferry *Estonia*, with the loss of some 900 lives. The shock for Swedish people, a safety-conscious and peace-loving nation if ever there was one, was immense; with no exaggeration the unthinkable had happened. And almost without hesitation, Swedish people went to their churches not only to gather, to light candles, and to mourn privately but also in the correct anticipation that someone (the archbishop, in fact) would articulate on their behalf (vicariously) both the sentiments of the people and the meaning of the tragedy for human living. This, for Swedish people, is precisely what the churches are for and why they should be sustained financially.

The death of Princess Diana in August 1997 offers a second illustration. In the week following the accident, significant numbers of British people were instinctively drawn to their churches. This happened in two ways: first the churches became an important, though not the only, gathering point for a whole range of individual gestures of mourning in which Christian and less Christian symbols became inextricably mixed, both materially (candles, playing cards, and Madonnas) and theologically (life after death was strongly affirmed, but with no notion of final judgment). More significant, however, was the awareness in the population as a whole that multiple and well-intentioned gestures of individual mourning were inadequate in themselves to mark the end of this particular life, as indeed of any other. Hence, the need for public ritual or public liturgy (in other words a funeral), and where else but in the established church? The fact that Princess Diana had not led an unequivocally Christian life was immaterial—she, like the rest of us, had a right to the services of the church at the end of her life. It follows that the churches must exist in order to meet such demands, ambiguous though they are.

A third and particularly poignant example of vicarious religion took place in a small East Anglian town (in England) in August 2002. Two schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, were murdered by a school caretaker in Soham, Cambridgeshire, at the beginning of the school holidays—an episode that shocked the nation. The reaction of both the families and the community was, however, immediate. Once again they turned to the church, personified in the form of the local vicar, who emerged as the spokesperson both for the immediate family of each child and for the population as a whole. The church building became the focus of mourning, offering both comfort and ritual as the devastated community tried to come to terms with what had happened. At the end of August, a memorial service took place in Ely Cathedral. At this point, it was necessary to find a building that offered sufficient space for all those who wanted to take part (the local church no longer sufficed for even a ticket-only service). Some form of closure, or at least a moving on, was achieved, finally, as the school year recommenced: the school community gathered on the playing field as the vicar (once again his symbolic role is important) released two white doves into the sky.

The crucial point to grasp in terms of sociological method is the need to be attentive to episodes, whether individual or collective, in or through which the implicit becomes explicit. With this in mind, it is equally important to remember that the examples just described are simply large-scale and often media-hyped versions of what goes on all the time in the life cycles of ordinary people. Individual families and communities regularly pause for thought at critical moments in their existence, frequently marking these with some form of liturgy. These are moments when the normal routines of life are suspended, when—to put the same point in a different way—the abnormal becomes normal, in terms of conversation as well as behavior. Birth (baptism) and death are the most obvious of these events, but confirmation and marriage remain significant for many; they offer important counterevidence to the collapse of conventional religion, though more so in the Lutheran parts of northern Europe than in the British case. If follows that the strength of conventional religious institutions must be measured as much in these individual and collective events as in weekly attendance or creedal assent.

Measurement might also be made in media terms. Surely one of the most remarkable events of 2005 can be found in the huge and global response to the death of John Paul II. And despite their relative secularity, European populations—alongside many others—suspended their normal activities to mark this moment, to a truly remarkable extent. In many countries, not least Britain, the domestic agenda was simply set on one side, while officials and significant sections of the population participated—directly or via television—in the liturgy that marked the passing of a life.[15] Clearly this "Vicar" of Rome had touched the lives of many, well beyond the Catholic faithful, representing on a global scale the moral and spiritual aspirations that were embodied both in his office and in his own charisma. Hence the huge response to his

funeral—possibly (give the scale of the broadcast) the largest communal ritual event in the world's history. This too provides a measure of the religious iceberg that lies beneath the often-secular surface.

Possibilities for the Future

What, then, of the future? Even if sociologists pay attention to the wider and deeper range of data available to them, will we find vicarious religion enduring into the twenty-first century, or will it gradually erode to the point of no return? And what factors do we need to take into account in making these necessarily hazardous predictions? A full account of this question lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but two important changes should be noted.[16] First, the historic churches—despite their continuing presence—are quite clearly losing their capacity to discipline the religious thinking of large sections of the population, especially among the young. And to the extent that future generations have relatively little exposure to conventional Christian ideas or rituals, they will be less likely to maintain expectations about the church's role in either their individual or collective lives. Second, the range of religious choice widens all the time as new forms of religion come into Europe from outside, largely as the result of the movement of people. Populations that have arrived in Europe primarily for economic reasons bring with them different ways of being religious; conversely, European people travel the world, experiencing among other things considerable religious diversity. The implications of both changes, internal and external, are clear. Taken together, they alter the cultural consensus on which vicarious practice has rested.

The same point can be made in a different way. In many respects, a genuine religious market is beginning to emerge in most parts of the Continent—of that there can be no doubt. The crucial question lies, however, not in the existence of the market in itself but in the capacities of Europeans to make use of it. It may or may not be the case that an increase in religious alternatives results in an increase in religious activity.[17] Either way, however, a progressively more observable trend is taking place both inside and outside the historic churches: that is, from an understanding of religion as a form of obligation to an increasing emphasis on "consumption" or choosing. What until recently was simply imposed (with all the negative connotations of that word) or inherited (a rather more positive spin) becomes instead a matter of personal choice. I may go to church (or to another religious organization) because I want to, maybe for a short period or maybe for longer, perhaps to fulfill a particular need in my life, perhaps a more general one, but I have no *obligation* either to attend in the first place or to continue if I do not want to. My commitment, moreover, may be strong, significant, minimal, or simply expedient.

As such this pattern is entirely compatible with vicariousness: the churches need to be there in order that I may attend them if I so choose. The "chemistry,"

however, may gradually alter, a mutation that is discernible in both practice and belief, not to mention the connections between them. Voluntary institutions have very different implications to their vicarious equivalents. Hence, for example, the shift from baptism as an almost universal obligation (at times enforced by coercion) to baptism as a sign of voluntary membership, or from confirmation as a widespread rite of passage for teenagers to confirmation as a sign of full commitment undertaken by individuals of almost any age. Liturgies mutate accordingly, though some of them more easily than others.[18]

The arrival of entirely new forms of religion should be seen in this context. Immigrations into Europe are diverse and include both Christian and non-Christian constituencies. Both are important in terms of the religious life of Europe in the twenty-first century. The presence of Islam, however, is of particular significance, partly because of the numbers involved but also because Islam—by its very nature—is acting as a catalyst in the religious life of the host societies. Islam not only offers an additional choice to Europeans but also alters the parameters within which choice takes place. More precisely, the existence of significant Muslim minorities has obliged Europeans to reopen questions that were considered closed—most notably, the assumption that religion is a private rather than public matter in modern European societies. Two examples must suffice: one positive, one negative. It was the Muslim community, more than any other in Britain, that urged the government to include a question about religion in the 2001 British census. The reason was straightforward: the community wished to be known as Muslims in public life, not as a series of fragmented ethnic or national identities. The Christian constituency was quick to follow suit; civil servants rather less so.[19] Conversely, the debate surrounding the wearing of the Muslim scarf in the French public school system has prompted a strongly secular backlash. Legislation passed in 2004 proscribed the wearing of any religious symbol in the classroom; in France, religion remains firmly in the private sphere (Davie, forthcoming [a]).

Hence a complex set of interlocking factors that, taken together, challenge the historical model of European religion: an erosion of the historic disciplines, an increasing level of choice, the shift away from ascriptive forms of membership, the arrival of significant other faith communities, and, in some parts of Europe at least, a realignment of the public and the private in questions of religion. The impact on vicariousness will be considerable; its survival (or not) becomes an important *empirical* question requiring diverse and necessarily flexible methodologies.

A Note on the American Case

A decade and a half of lecturing in different parts of Europe (both Protestant North and Catholic South) has convinced me that Europeans from all parts of

the Continent understand the meaning of vicariousness (an understanding that overrides questions of translation). Once the idea has been put in place in a lecture, the responses come easily, accompanied by ever more interesting illustrations. Explaining the concept to an American audience is, in contrast, much more difficult; the idea of vicariousness has far less resonance in the United States. This is hardly surprising in a part of the world where an entirely different ecclesiastical history has led to different understandings of the relationship between state and church, and between populations and religious institutions. The church tax system of northern Europe exemplifies one relationship (the public utility); the freely given (American) tithe implies a very different set of obligations and expectations.[20]

That is true. Interestingly, however, in certain understandings of the term, the notion of vicarious religious may also be present in the United States. One such can be found in Herberg's classic text on American religious sociology, *Protestant—Catholic—Jew*, which refers to vicarious practice in some Jewish communities: "In Orthodox and Conservative, even in some Reform communities, there developed a curious form of vicarious observance by the rabbi, who was expected to live up more or less to the traditional standards which were no longer operative among the members of his congregation" (1960, 192). Clearly this echoes some, but not all, of the ideas set out earlier in this chapter. In discerning the differences, I am indebted to a conversation with Steve Warner,[21] who argues there is indeed an American form of vicariousness in some aspects of religious life. More precisely, there is a delegation of responsibility in terms of observance and belief, and in a feeling that religious professionals should speak out (or prophesy) in public life. Conversely, there is little understanding of the notion of public utility. As Warner notes, Jews of all the religious constituencies in the United States are likely to understand that synagogues have to be paid for *by their members*; they should be beholden neither to the state nor to society as a whole.

Americans, however, do understand that they want religious institutions to be there in a crisis, no less than Europeans. After 9/11, for example, large sections in the population turned toward some form of religion at least in the initial stages of the crisis. And whether they were regular attenders or not, American communities, like their European counterparts, were glad that their churches (and other religious organizations) were there (Ammerman 2002). Rather similar sentiments can be detected in the memorialization of Ground Zero. Whatever is put in place in this part of New York must represent the sentiments of the American people, not only the families who lost relatives. With this in mind, and despite the differences in history, vicarious religion may prove a useful concept in the analysis of American religious life. Hence the need for scholars in both places to consider with great care the notion of "vicariousness" itself, its content in any given society, its implications for methodology, and the theoretical questions that inevitably ensue.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Voas and Crockett (2005), which contains a summary of the major points of contention.

2. Historically, a Church of England parish frequently owned land (known as *glebe land*). The income from this went toward paying the expenses of a minister. Often a rector would be appointed, and he received the income from the land. He could either carry out the duties of a parish priest himself or use some of the income to employ a "vicar" to do it for him. The meaning of the term *vicar* in the Catholic Church is rather different but still has the notion of doing a job on behalf of someone else.

3. Demand for all the occasional offices remains high in the Nordic countries, Ireland, Italy, and Greece. An account of the occasional offices in Western Europe can be found in Davie (2000). In terms of marriage, this draws heavily on Dittgen (1994, 1997).

4. So-called secular funerals need to be approached with care. It may simply mean a funeral taken by the family without the presence of a religious professional, but still containing a number of religious elements. Not all "secular" funerals are taken by a recognized secular officiant.

5. Shortly after David Jenkins's consecration in York Minster, the building was struck by lightning, an event that was seen by some as a sign of divine displeasure! This episode was given extensive press coverage at the time (July 1984). See also David Jenkins's own account (Jenkins 2002).

6. In Britain, royal divorces provoke rather similar reactions; quite simply they disappoint.

7. A rather similar study of the American debate can be found in Wood and Bloch (1995).

8. One commentator, Anders Bäckström, put this point even more subtly: what Swedish people in fact believe in is belonging.

9. See, for example, the material produced by the European Values Study (http://www.europeanvalues.nl/index2/htm). A more detailed account of the Swedish case can be found in Bäckström, Edgardh Beckman, and Pettersson (2004).

10. The best sources of data on the changing situation in different parts of central and Eastern Europe can be found in the ongoing work of the European Values Study (see note 9), the International Social Survey Programme (http://www.issp.org/homepage.htm), and the publications emerging from the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA). Some idea of the scope of ISORECEA'S work and publication can be found in the list of contributors in a recent collected volume (Marinovic Jerolimonov, Zrinscak, and Borowik 2004). Easily accessible English-language summaries of the changes taking place in this part of the world can be found in Pollack (2002) and Froese (2004).

11. A similar role can still be discerned in the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin some ten years later (see Berger 2001, 195).

12. Davie (2000) explores these themes in some detail.

13. In this respect I largely agree with Voas and Crockett that "believing without belonging" might "enter honorable retirement" (2005, 25). I doubt, however, that it will be allowed to do so (not least for onomatopoeic reasons). It will, I fear, continue to be abused as well as used in the debates that emerge in the twenty-first century.

14. See Bréchon (2002) and Lambert (2002, 2004) for a further discussion of these changes.

15. Including, unbelievably, a royal wedding.

16. These themes are more fully developed in Davie (2005, forthcoming[b]).

17. This sentence evokes the ongoing and at times aggressive debate in the sociology of religion already alluded to in the introduction to this book. Secularization theorists argue that religious diversity undermines religious plausibility and is therefore corrosive of religion more generally. Rational choice theorists claim the reverse: that religious diversity, by its very nature, stimulates growth. The two points of view and their applications in different parts of the modern West (notably in Europe and the United States) are discussed in detail in Davie (forthcoming[b]).

18. A good example of confusion can be found in the debates surrounding baptism in the Church of England. Newer versions of the liturgy are clearly predicated on a model of voluntarism and work well for the congregations and families who are thinking in these terms. They are manifestly less appropriate for those still operating under the "old" system, for whom the explicitness of the language causes difficulties for all parties involved.

19. Good accounts of this episode and its implications for policy can be found in Francis (2003) and Weller (2004). The question was included in the census and, among other things, revealed that more than 70 percent of the population in England and Wales elected to call themselves Christian—a figure considerably higher than most people expected.

20. These systems are, of course, mixed in practice, especially in England, where there is no church tax, a certain amount of inherited wealth, and a marked reluctance to give generously.

21. Personal communication, June 2005.

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2

Religion as Communication: The Changing Shape of Catholicism in Europe

Enzo Pace

In the generation since Vatican II, Catholicism in Europe has undergone enormous change. The Church's loss of moral authority, of political power, and of active participants has been described by many as a profound process of secularization. This chapter will both demonstrate the depth of the change and suggest new ways of understanding it. In spite of recurrent indicators of individualization of belief, for instance, in many European countries religion seems today to function as guardian of the collective identity and memory, even as those same societies are becoming more multireligious. Focusing the analysis on European Catholicism and, particularly, on the new role played by the Catholic Church in the public sphere in two historically Catholic countries—Italy and Spain—I will develop the hypothesis that Catholic leaders are accepting the idea that religious power must work more and more as communication. They can longer impose norms, but they can reconstruct a romantic sense of being a society, a collective identity rooted in the Christian pattern of values, projecting unity where there is social, religious, and ideological difference.

The evolution of Catholicism in Italy and Spain illustrates changes in the traditional model of authority with the Church's declining ability to enforce claims to the absoluteness of truth. It also demonstrates the Church's attempt to invent a new means of communicating the truth, as well as new forms of collective and national identity. In earlier times, the Church supplied trusted truths, embodied in a set of symbols and norms that were tied to collective consciousness and identity. Today, both the norms and the meanings supplied by the Church have been transformed but have not disappeared.

From Church Authority to Individual Autonomy

It is important to begin by recognizing that the majority of people in Italy, and Spain even more so, continue to refer to Catholicism as a meaningful world. Eighty-seven percent of the Italian population continue to call themselves Catholics, nearly the same proportion (84 percent) we find among Spaniards. The meanings Italian and Spanish Catholics attribute to their religion are, however, increasingly disconnected from the Church's moral authority (Diaz-Salazar 1988; Giner and Sarasa 1993; Michel 1996, 2004).

They claim a relative autonomy in religious and ethical behavior that is summed up by the following testimony. "I was there too at the Pope's great get-together at Tor Vergata this summer," writes a young man from Turin to an Italian newspaper after World Youth Day, celebrated in Rome as part of the Catholic Church's Jubilee for the year 2000.

> It was a beautiful night with lots of young people from all over the world. There were young people cooking, singing and praying; and there were those making love, like me and Sylvie, a French girl from Lille. I had met her the day before and when we reached the rally, it was still daytime. When night fell and it got a bit cold, that's when it happened. We said we loved each other, that we both had the same faith, perhaps she more than me, and that we would carry on seeing each other. We wrote to each other and I once went to Lille, deep in France, but I soon realised that she didn't really care much about me or about our relationship. . . . When I was younger, I was in *Azione Cattolica*, the movement for young Catholics, but now I wonder if it makes sense being Catholic if everyone then does as they please. The Pope has very precise ideas on sex and he repeats them at every opportunity, but Catholics do the same as everyone else and if it wasn't so, I wouldn't have asked Sylvie to make love that night and now I wouldn't be feeling so bad. (*La Repubblica*, October 8, 2001, 14)

This short account of the experience of two young people at the mass rally held in August 2001 is no different from many other stories that go untold and unnoticed.

Despite the many efforts made by the Catholic Church to reawaken religious and ethical consciousness, willingness to conform to the Church's sexual pronouncements continues to decline. Some crude data will suffice to illustrate the trends. In Italy more than 70 percent of the population declared themselves in favor of the use of contraceptives, and the fertility rate fell from 2.7 in the early 1960s to 1.1 in 1995. In 1985, 84 percent of the female population in Spain said they used contraceptives, and Spain has seen a drop in its birthrate similar to Italy's (Alberdi 1999; Perez-Algote and Garcia 2005).

These departures from the Church's moral teachings have also been accompanied by declines in attendance and belief. Indicators of participation in the Church have remained stationary over the last twenty years, but by 1992, religious practice among Spain's under-twenty-four population had plummeted to 18 percent (Maurice and Serrano 1992). The religiosity of Italians and Spaniards is often found, if at all, outside the walls of the Church. If one can speak of religious recomposition in Spain, it should be sought in the revival of local cults and popular devotion, which enables whole communities to reassert their local identity (Albert-Llorca 1996).

Only a very small minority are firmly convinced of the existence of just one true religion. In Italy, this number is 32.5 percent (Cesareo et al. 1995), whereas in Spain it is 27 percent (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Six out of ten Italians endorse the statement "I would like there to be a religion based on a few fundamental common beliefs, which would unite Christians, Moslems, Buddhists and other believers." Among those who believe in God or in a supreme being, but who do not belong to any specific religion, the number who express this sentiment rises to 70 percent.

To sum up, it could be argued that the Catholic Church in these two countries is no longer capable of patrolling the symbolic boundaries of its system of belief and practice. In predominantly Catholic societies, paradoxically, alongside beliefs and religious practices, which are clearly inspired and influenced by the religion of birth (Catholicism), a relativistic attitude toward that religion of birth is widespread. This way of believing is sufficiently prevalent to be dubbed "the dictatorship of relativism" by Cardinal Ratzinger shortly before he was elected as pope.

One of the mechanisms by which the Church formerly patrolled its moral and theological boundaries was the practice of confession. The generations born in the 1940s and 1950s were told this practice should be carried out on a weekly basis. But today only a very small proportion of believing and practicing Catholics go to confession. In Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, this represents a profound change. If we examine the reasons given by the interviewees in a national survey in Italy, we find that many of them (almost 40 percent) agree with the idea that "a priest is not needed, it is enough to repent before God." This weakening of the ties between believer and confessor in a predominantly Catholic society has produced a silent revolution in the hearts and minds of many people (including those who believe and faithfully keep to other traditional religious practices).

The unexpected effects of this silent revolution have manifested themselves over a relatively long period of time and involved at least two generations. The older generation directly—and enthusiastically—experienced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Their children, in turn, were often born and raised in a family environment where religion was still talked about, but in a liberal, critical, and antiauthoritarian way. The unexpected results have been

far-reaching. First, there has been a weakening of the ongoing transmission of *erga omnes* moral models. Ethical teachings drawn up by theologians were no longer translated through confession into codes of conduct applied to people's concrete behavior. Second, there has been a gradual deconsecration of the figure of the priest—with his power to "bind and unbind" and "pardon sins"—in exchange for the primacy of the individual believer's conscience in dealing directly with God. And third, there has been a progressive detachment of various spheres of the life of the individual (moral, economic, political, and sexual) from the religious control of the Church. Without engagement with the Church's "specialists in the treatment of souls," a significant traditional means of religious communication with the mass of the faithful has been weakened.

In the history of Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, confession has played a central role in the spiritual orientation of great masses of believers. With the loss of this practice, the Church's mode of communication is less direct and specific. As a result, in Italy, the priest is regarded increasingly as a witness to the faith and less as the bearer of holy functions, increasingly as a social group leader and less as the mouthpiece of an eschatological message (Garelli 1996, 2001). Over the last generation, then, priests have lost their authoritative role as confessors, and the Church has lost the loyal moral obedience of its members.

From Inclusive Identity to New Alignments

The role of Catholicism in countries such as Italy and Spain has never been solely about individual morality, however. The Catholic religion has always been an important symbolic resource in the construction of the collective national identity, as well. For better or worse, it has helped to strengthen the myth of national unity—in Spain, since the Reconquista, and in Italy, since the origins of the nation-state after the Risorgimento in 1861. To paraphrase a well-known expression coined by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, *we cannot not call ourselves Catholics*. This attitude was widely held and continues to be so. It represents a generally shared symbolic code that goes beyond the bitter and violent ideological conflicts that have afflicted Italy and Spain in modern times.

This widespread attitude has been the object of political mobilization from time to time. Sometimes it has been used to celebrate the structural embodiment of a fused religious and national identity, stronger since its origins in Spanish history, more controversial and contorted as regards Italy. In Spain, since the fifteenth century national identity has been based on the idea of purity of bloodstock (i.e., no more Jewish or Muslim blood) and closely identified with Catholicism, whereas the birth of the modern Italian nation in 1861 was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church. Rome became the capital of Italy only

after a hard-fought battle with the Vatican. In both countries, however, Catholicism came to be used to mark the boundaries, both symbolic and territorial, of areas of Catholic predominance over against socialist-communist hegemony. The attitude *we cannot not call ourselves Catholics* is based on a belief system and a socioreligious organization with ramifications throughout the whole of society, a society historically governed and administered by the Catholic Church, with a close correlation between Catholic collective identity and the political activities of the Catholic Church.

In a parallel way, the socialist-communist collective identity operated as a "secular church" that was encompassing in its own way. For some generations people were simply accustomed to blurring the distinction between a religious procession and a political meeting in the local square, between holy shrines and public places, accustomed to seeing priests directly engaged in politics at the same time that rabid anticlericals were whipping up messianic feelings of liberation from social or political oppression.

During this historical phase, dominated by the modern religious wars, the imagination and the identity of an individual were molded according to the paradigm of *inclusion*. In a social system polarized between two opposing blocs, an individual could not help but side with one or the other. Not to do so might jeopardize one's social success. If you were part of a subculture, whether *red* (the communists) or *white* (the Catholics), you belonged to a kind of *extended family*, each opposed to the other. In each, it was possible to identify with a community and build together a model of society that reflected your system of beliefs (Pace 1998). The individual was included in a well-structured relational system that directed everyday action in the name of different socioreligious cosmologies. Catholicism, in postwar Italy and Spain at least, was one form of organic cosmology existing in opposition to the other one, that of socialist-communist inspiration (Casanova 1985; Duocastella 1967; Perez-Rico 1977).

For a certain period in modern history, then, it was possible to speak of "the religion of the Italians" or "the religion of the Spaniards." The myth of collective consciousness (both national and modern), the social practices it fostered, and the individual's imagination where it lodged together formed a kind of ideal triangle. Religious identity entailed a complex formula with multiple functions. It could be used to refer to what is usually termed religion—the religion of the Catholic Church—but also to the secular belief systems spawned by political ideologies and to cultural identities rooted in organic community subcultures. It is necessary to understand fully the historical significance of the complex role played by religion in Italy and Spain (albeit with many diachronic and structural differences between the two) in order to grasp the process of change that these predominantly Catholic societies have undergone over the last twenty or thirty years. Such a period may be short compared with the long flow of history, but for this very reason it has been convulsive and contradictory.

The end of the old organic order is conventionally dated in Italy from the 1974 referendum, which saw a substantial majority (more than 60 percent) vote to approve the divorce law. This was seen as the start of a process of individualization of belief, as even believing, practicing Catholics, lauding the innovations of the Second Vatican Council, began to discover that "obedience is no longer a virtue" (Milani 1968). For a new generation of communists and socialists, the repression of Dubcek's Prague, in 1968, was an equally unsettling event. They, too, rebelled and refused to obey their elders. In both cases, the truth of the respective belief systems no longer appeared absolute; people began to think differently and felt a growing need for independence.

This coincided favorably with modern ways of thinking and individualist lifestyles. There was a shift from *inclusion*, which stratified individuals into two great blocs of collective belief (the *two churches*), as people broke away from the meaning networks, which had protected and surrounded them for a considerable length of time. This shift from stratification to differentiation meant that for the first time there was pluralism within Catholicism (De Sandre 2003; Garelli, Guizzardi, and Pace 2003). Likewise, in the left-wing community, the new generation "secularized" politics, questioning the ipse dixit of communist orthodoxy. New generations sprang up and began to "run their own businesses" as regards ethics, politics, and religion.

Within this new context, it was also possible to discuss modern principles of separation between church and state and the neutrality and universality of the law with regard to religious institutions or groups. In 1984, for example, a reform of the 1929 Concordat profoundly changed the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Italian state. The article that recognized Catholicism as the state religion was struck out, and there was agreement to gradually abandon the system of so-called admissible religions (non-Catholic religions recognized by the state on the basis of ad hoc political decisions conferring public and judicial status). With this reform, the secular functions of the state were freed from the historical influence of Fascism, which had established a form of limited sovereignty of the state in religious matters.

Catholicism and New Collective Identities

Over the last thirty years, then, Italy and Spain have disentangled the organic unities that bound religious and political identities together. The result of this disentanglement has not, however, been the disappearance of religion from the collective consciousness, but Italy and Spain have not taken identical paths. In Spain, the end of the Francoist regime and the establishment of a new constitution that allowed regional autonomy considerably weakened the links between Catholic identity and national identity. In Italy, a somewhat paradoxical phenomenon occurred. After the collapse of the Christian Democratic Party

(the most important political party for the Catholics), the Catholic Church was faced, in 1990, with the appearance on the political scene of the openly secessionist Northern League (Diamanti 1993). The Church responded by becoming the champion of Italian national unity. It reformulated (or at least tried to reformulate) the relationship between Catholicism and the collective memory, seeking to show that the foundation stone of national consciousness is a "common religious faith." The Church tried in this way to transform the political unity of Catholics, which it had preached throughout the forty years of Christian Democratic hegemony, into a collective myth of national unity.

The myth of the unity of a Catholic nation still constitutes a powerful symbol in Italy, but less so in Spain. In Italy, it is used both by the Catholic Church and by the major political parties, whose leaders carefully avoid questioning its social and cultural legitimacy in their public speeches. When the Catholic bishops publicly declared their strong opposition to gay marriages and the liberalization of artificial insemination, for example, the political parties were careful to align their views accordingly. In Spain, by contrast, after the advent of the Zapatero government, the Catholic Church is no longer able to exert a strong influence on political decisions. It is as if the myth of the (cultural) unity of a Catholic nation continued to hold sway in Italy, in contrast to the more secular Spanish nation.

A parallel gap between the two can be seen in findings from the World Values Survey (with pooled responses from 1981 to 2001, in Norris and Inglehart 2004, 85). The mean frequency of prayer and of religious participation is consistently higher in Italy than in Spain. Whereas Italians are closer to Ireland and the United States (between 4.5 and 5.5 on the scale), Spaniards reach only 3.5 on average and are closer to Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Finland, and Iceland.

The politics of identity is the core strategy of the Catholic Church in Europe, particularly where the Catholics represent the (at least nominal) majority of the population, as in Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Many actions by bishops, religious movements, and intellectuals are aimed at the reconstruction of (Catholic) identity in a secularized Europe (Davie 2000, 2002; Berger 1999). In various countries, the Church is promoting in the public sphere the idea that in the new multicultural and multireligious Europe we are losing our Christian roots. During the debate on the new European Constitution, for instance, Catholic bishops waged a campaign for including an explicit reference to the Christian origins of Europe in the Preamble. Despite many desperate appeals by Pope John Paul II, the operation was unsuccessful. There are two basic reasons for the Church's lobbying in the European arena. First, the bishops are only too well aware that the number of practicing Catholics has now dwindled to a minority. Second, other religions, which are new to the European panorama, are on the increase in terms of both numbers of adherents and social visibility. The number of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists is growing, together

with adherents to the Orthodox Churches (Moldavian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian) and the new ethno-Pentecostal churches from Africa and Asia. The Catholic bishops, therefore, are understandably perturbed by the considerable risk they run of losing cultural hegemony.

The Catholic system cannot, of course, return to the old organic order. It must accept the new pluralism within and outside of the Church. Modern forms of religious mobility have multiplied because of individualized belief (Hervieu-Léger 1993, 2000); the symbolic boundaries of the Catholic belief system are easy to cross, and authoritative customs no longer exist to regulate the comings and goings of practitioners. The formerly dominant ecclesiastical organization—the Catholic Church—seems prepared to move with the times. Diotallevi and I have developed certain theoretical suggestions for interpreting the paradox of the Catholic socioreligious situation in Europe (Diotallevi 2001; Pace 2003). Our present hypothesis is that the Catholic Church is learning to act as a symbolic system capable of interacting with a highly varied social environment by accepting its complexity. Instead of trying to reduce that complexity and impose stable and definite norms, it has adopted a modern way of being a church, *which appears to work better in some contexts than others.* It does not work in certain areas of social life (as Weber had pointed out), such as the political, economic, and erotic spheres, where individuals decide with increasing autonomy. However, it is still effective in some areas of the community, particularly where the crisis in the welfare state has left gaps in providing assistance to vulnerable categories, such as immigrants. It also exerts an influence on the sensitive issues of modern biotechnology (e.g., deciding when life begins and ends) and family law (e.g., the notion that only heterosexual couples can form a family).

The current socioreligious situation involves individualization of belief systems, but that does not mean simply the privatization of religion. The Catholic Church has never ceased (in Italy more than in Spain) to play an extremely important public role (Casanova 1994). In recent times, but in different circumstances, Italy and Spain have got over the recurrent "collective drama" that characterized their histories: the *ante litteram* clash of civilizations (Catholicism vs. communism), which restrained the development of democracy. When the religious sphere rid itself of its historical compromise with politics and gained relative independence, individuals gained "free circulation of hearts and minds" from one field to the other and between the two dominant ideological blocs. Secularization triggered a wider process of individualization on a vaster scale. When it became clear to growing numbers of people that it was fictitious to imagine God and Caesar, logos and demos, united, both Catholics and left-wingers were affected. The new generation of left-wingers began to represent themselves as postcommunists, while still calling themselves communists, whereas Catholics began to say, "I proclaim myself Catholic, but I do as I please."

With this shift, Catholicism becomes what Luhmann (1991) would call a code of symbolic generalization. Individuals claim the final decision on the precise contents of this code, increasing the range of conduct that falls outside the official system of belief. Generalized Catholic symbols provide a collective memory but are no longer directly linked to predictable social actions.

This new generalized public religious function can be seen in the battles against gay marriage (in Spain) and against artificial insemination techniques (in Italy). These efforts represent for the Catholic Church not only a dramatic defence of the ethical values it sees as attacked by secularism in Europe but also the test case for measuring whether the Church can use its power of symbolic communication to create and extend a consensus around ethical issues. The measure of this new means of communication is not only the ability to mobilize the public around these issues but also the ability to be flexible in linking Catholic beliefs with many different socioreligious constituencies.

A good example is the issue of gay couples. In Spain, 60 percent of the population continues to support the government's proposal to recognize gay marriages, despite the protest demonstrations by Catholics (led in June 2005, in Madrid, by certain bishops taking a public role for the first time). In Italy, on the other hand, nothing of the like has been seen, since no political party of any electoral importance has mentioned gay marriages as such. At the very most, they speak in terms of a cohabitation agreement (along the lines of French legislation). The difference is by no means unimportant. The question of whether or not gay marriages should be allowed, in fact, covers a whole range of opinions, which do not necessarily coincide with the views of church religion. The Catholic Church in Italy uses "yes or no to gay marriages" as a means of setting up a united front of public opinion that goes beyond the Catholics who go to church every Sunday and take part in Catholic associations and movements. In Spain, on the other hand, the "yes-no" formula is unable to split the combined forces of liberals, progressive Catholics, and socialists.

In this role, then, the Church seeks to act in the public sphere as the specialist in public ethics. It is also the repository of widely shared values, which are not necessarily Catholic or with an exclusively Catholic copyright. And it acts as the safeguard of collective memory, even for those who are not great believers and who rarely go to church. Its new communicative authority rests more on expertise in public ethics than in theology, more on symbolic meanings than dogmas to be imposed.

Achieving its goal of reconstructing Catholic identity in Europe will require, of course, a more flexible narrative of sociocultural identity, one able to meet the challenge of the contingency and complexity of the social environment that is deeply transforming European societies. Paraphrasing Schütz's (1964) concept of music (music is making music together), European religion might become a form of communication that shapes social identity but that will require the *virtuosity of improvisation*. To *make religion together* will require

the ability to imagine unity among the diversities, sharing a common feeling of belonging among diverse individuals. The real miracles of a religious narrative are not just the portentous events attributed to a prophet or saint but also, from a sociological point of view, the invention of a *mobile tradition*.

The Church as Virtuoso Improviser of Beliefs and Identities

This new kind of tradition began to be seen during the papacy of John Paul II, a charismatic leader who tried to invent a new style of communication that would link the system of believing (Catholicism), on one hand, and the social environment, on the other. He is what we might call a *mobile personality*. He was able to cope with the modern individualization of belief and imagine a new social scenario. We saw in him the power of communicative action and collective discipline managed by an extraordinary leader who had the *virtue of improvisation* (Asad 1993). The virtue of improvisation describes the extraordinary skills of a person, like a prophet or religious leader, who can extend and influence the process of constructing and reconstructing a belief system.

The case of Karol Wojtyla would require a volume in itself, but here two facts are worth mentioning. The first concerns the origins of his charisma, the second its impact on the media. Proof and recognition of his charisma first came about in the town squares of Poland between 1979 and 1989. From that moment on, there formed around this figure a new type of following, a very special type of pilgrim: the media, which took it upon themselves to transform a series of pastoral missions into a religious spectacular (Guizzardi 1983). The personality of Pope John Paul II gave rise to an extraordinary combination of charismatic morality and a modern spirit of media communication. Its power was celebrated in the exceptional public ceremony surrounding the physical demolition of the Berlin Wall. As early as 1979 Wojtyla had made it possible for us to imagine an event no one thought would ever really come about (the end of the Soviet regime), but which everyone hoped would happen. In other words, he had crossed the threshold of the collective imagination and shown us that a different world was possible.

Pope John Paul II went on to invest the yield on the symbolic capital accumulated during these events in a new means of communication for the Church itself: the organization of great collective happenings. These events conveyed a moral and religious message capable of reconstituting a sense of belonging and a Catholic identity, although the message itself was complex. In this case, the medium was the message as never before. In all probability, these large-scale meetings of the world's youth were moments of emotional identification, which do not necessarily convince participants of the specific doctrinal contents communicated (as we saw in the testimony cited earlier). Perhaps more efficacious was the pope's opposition to the second Gulf War. In Spain and

Italy, his outspoken opposition helped to create a collective spirit without equal in other European countries. It was not so important what he actually said; he became a public icon for believers and nonbelievers, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. To some extent, this supports José Casanova's (1994) well-known thesis on the public dimension of religions in the contemporary world.

From a mobile personality we can expect a mobile system of symbolic boundaries. In other words, a charismatic leader may cross thresholds and boundaries that previously appeared to be impenetrable. Paradoxically, by so doing he creates a type of language (or communicative strategy) that constantly questions accepted beliefs and well-consolidated styles of communication. It is no mystery that the communicative style used by Pope John Paul II raised many an eyebrow in the well-tempered environment of the Roman Curia. Many clergymen were doubtful whether the crowds that gathered were really there to listen to his words or only to pay homage to his personality. Nevertheless, his mobile personality was able to transform what had previously been unthinkable and impossible into events that could be imagined as possible. His real breakthrough was to overcome the modern view that had relegated religion to the private sphere and attributed a declining role to religion in the life of society. In this he succeeded in convincing a good part of European public opinion. In European society, where the authority of the Catholic Church has long been in a situation of crisis, charisma has attempted to fill in the gaps and restore by other means the virtue of obedience. We will see whether the operation has been successful in the workings of the new pope.

In this sense, a mobile personality challenges modernity and its limits (Ammerman 2003; Seligman 2000). He is able, in fact, to move and change the symbolic boundaries of the belief system. Through the virtue of improvisation, he invents a new means of communication that, on one hand, mobilizes the symbolic resources, preexistent in the system and in its relation with the socioreligious environment, and, on the other, transforms the available and received patterns of symbols into a new moral shape. Like the charismatic prophets Weber (1961) described, however, this experimentation can be risky. A mobile personality is characterized by an aleatory impulse: he takes a risk to offer a new definition of social identity to a people that perceives its own identity at risk.

Traditional religious authority, as we have seen, is no longer possible in Italy and Spain. Legal and societal power has been transformed into the more elusive power of religious communication. The principle of authority has moved outward to the relationship between system and environment; it is no longer based on the code of truth but on personal charisma, in our case Karol Wojtyla's charisma. As with any charismatic leader, of course, the problem is how to replace his personal charisma after his death or, in sociological terms, how to reinvest the symbolic capital created by his charismatic leadership.

Through John Paul II's charismatic leadership the Catholic Church tested the possibilities of the power of communication. Instead of invoking the authority

of Church dogma, can members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy assert themselves as guardians of the identity and collective memory of an entire people? Can they be seen as the promoters of the civil religion of the nation, particularly for those nations that until now have been seen as Catholic? If so, *Catholicism might become a means of communication that enables Europeans to imagine that the social situation is united when it is actually highly differentiated*. The Catholic Church could play the role (as religious actor, among others) of being a reservoir of European memory. That memory is being contested, however, as Europeans are confronting Islam. Increasingly there is a new Other against which we are defining ourselves. The Church's ability to act as a flexible, mobile, improviser of symbols (drawing on the reservoir widely available in the culture) implies that it will be a player in the production of new collective identities in Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. What we do not know is whether those identities will creatively include Muslims (and others) in European identity or whether Muslims will simply unite disparate Catholics (and other Christians) in an imagined collective unity against a religious outsider.

In any case, religious, cultural, and social identity will continue to be shaped and reshaped by the communicative powers of religious leaders. In this sense, it seems to me, a system of belief is not so much a well-defined *essence* (a *res*) as it is a mixed, relational, inventive, and mobile process. At any moment, beliefs are challenged both by diffusion from one sociocultural environment to another and by the process of individualization. Through the virtuosity of improvisation, leaders take risks in order to reduce risk, recognizing contingencies in order to supply new symbolic resources to those with whom they seek to communicate. Although they cannot impose either moral behavior or collective memory, a considerable range of communicative power is still available to them. In spite of what looks like secularization, religious symbols and identities remain highly salient in Italy and Spain.

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3

The New Voluntarism and the Case of Unsynagogued Jews

Lynn Davidman

> I had just gotten divorced and on Yom Kippur I went with a friend of mine who is also a nonpracticing Jew and we climbed Mount Liberty in New Hampshire. It had been the first snowfall, and it was thirty-two degrees so as we walked through the forest the branches were covered with ice, and sun was hitting them, and it was like walking through a forest of diamonds. It was completely sparkling the entire time. And as we came out onto the ledge the sky was bright blue and the valley still had all the colors so it was yellow and orange and my friend and I burst into tears. It was just . . . it was a time I had a sense that there is something that is so big and so good, you know, and that sense that is renewed every weekend I go and . . . the birds, it's just an incredible experience always and it's what fills me and renews me and I come off the mountain and people say, "Oh you sound inspired and it is truly inspirational." And I think, I guess, if religion were going to play a role in my life, that's what it would need to bring to me. And I think there are pieces of Judaism as I understand it that sort of fit with how I think, like how life should be lived, which probably helps to keep that connection.

This woman is one of thirty people I interviewed during the fall of 2001. Mostly third-generation Jewish Americans, and all living in the Rhode Island area, they had responded to an advertisement in the main local newspaper, the *Providence Journal*. The ad read, "Are you Jewish and unaffiliated with a synagogue? A Brown professor is writing a book on cultural Jews and is seeking to interview people aged

twenty-five and over. All interviewees are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. Please call Professor Lynn Davidman [phone number]." I received more than fifty calls in response to this ad. I selected thirty of these "unsynagogued Jews," chosen to produce a sample that had an equal number of women and men and an age range that included people aged thirty to seventy—the ages when most American Jews join synagogues, if they are going to.[1]

The interview questions were extensive and addressed family histories, including immigration, levels of religious observance across the generations, religious upbringing and education, respondents' sense of the precise nature of Judaism (religion, ethnicity, family tradition, and culture), their current identification and its basis, their ritual practices, and the Jewish socialization of their children.

Demographically and culturally, the people I interviewed are full participants in the American culture of choice. Nearly all were at least two generations removed from their immigrant forebears; they were largely middle-class college graduates who worked in professional capacities. Most had been raised within one of the well-established denominations, although some had been raised with little or no Jewish identification at all. How they had been raised, however, did not correlate with any systematic differences in their current self-representations as Jews. All clearly affirmed their understanding that religious association and practices are a matter of choice, but they nevertheless tenaciously held onto and enacted—in various ways—a strong sense of Jewish identity. They accomplished this sense of self by choosing to engage in a variety of Jewish ritual practices that constructed and represented their own understanding of the nature of Jewish identity.

As I spoke with my respondents, several key issues arose that became the focus of the study: Why do Jews who reject the rules and institutions of Judaism nevertheless create practices that echo the forms of the tradition? Why do people who are clearly choosing how to be Jewish think they have no choice about *being* Jewish? And why does this combination of ascribed identity and choice strike Americans (and sociologists) as so odd?

The Inherited Theories

To claim a Jewish identity and yet enact that identity in one's own way is to challenge a long line of thinking in sociology about achieved identities (arrived at through choices made by an individual) and ascribed identities (characteristics with which one is born). In general, the sociological tradition has seen these two concepts—ascription and achievement—as disparate ways of constructing a sense of self. Unsynagogued Jews provide an interesting challenge to this conceptual distinction because they indeed consider themselves to be Jewish (which they see as an ascribed, ethnic characteristic), but they also make

choices about how they construct (achieve) a Jewish identity, including the choice not to join a synagogue.

From its inception, the founders of sociology presented these concepts of achievement and ascription as oppositional ways of constructing identities, and as a means to distinguish between modern and "premodern" societies. They argued that roles and identities in premodern societies were largely a matter of "ascription," whereas roles and identities in modernity are characterized by "achievement." In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Émile Durkheim ([1893] 1997) described premodern societies as being held together by a "mechanical solidarity" born of a sameness that derived from many individuals being socialized to the same ascribed roles and seeing themselves as essentially similar to one another. Modern societies, Durkheim argued, are characterized by "organic solidarity," whereby individuals who have the freedom to learn different roles and develop independent identities are connected to one another not by their sameness but through their interdependence. Although organic solidarity poses a challenge to the strength of the *conscience collective*, it also carries with it the possibility of freedom, since social actors can now choose what to do and who to be.

Georg Simmel ([1908] 1955, 149) followed Durkheim's lead in contrasting the individualism of modernity with the traditional affiliations of a group that "absorbed the whole [person]." Simmel viewed people in premodern societies as being constrained by overlapping social circles, whereas the intersecting social circles of modernity leave people free to become unique individuals. While Durkheim and Simmel are among those who deserve credit for identifying traditional society with constraint and modern society with choice, it was anthropologist Ralph Linton (1936) who popularized the terms *achievement* and *ascription* as descriptors of the presumed dichotomy between modern and premodern roles and identity. In *The Social System*, Talcott Parsons (1951) followed Linton and highlighted ascription and achievement as one of the five sets of dichotomies, or "pattern variables," individuals use to orient themselves in the social world. Ascribed characteristics (which people consider to be fixed, immutable, or inherited) typify premodern societies, whereas achieved characteristics (which "place the accent on the performances of the incumbent") are the hallmark of modern societies (Parsons 1951, 111).

The "achievement-ascription" dichotomy has found its way into the sociology of religion as well. Peter Berger, whose ideas constituted the dominant paradigm in the sociology of religion for a generation, claimed that religion in traditional societies presented itself to the individual as a preexisting and not-to-be-questioned fact, whereas religion in modernity is characterized by pluralism, privatization, and the recognition that religion is a social construction. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger (1967) argued that an awareness of multiple worldviews and the accompanying sense that religion is a matter of personal choice would weaken the hold religion had on modern consciousness.

Although this part of the so-called secularization thesis has now been rejected by most sociologists, including Berger himself, the notion that religion in modernity is a matter of individual choice has survived the transition to the "new paradigm." R. Stephen Warner, who coined the term *new paradigm* to describe a postsecularization sociology of religion—especially for the United States—argued that "religion need not represent something in which people are primordially rooted. Religious affiliation in the United States is not tribal" (1993, 1078). Warner agrees with Berger that in modern societies religious identity loses its ascribed, taken-for-granted character; nevertheless, he and others (such as Neitz 1987) challenge the "old paradigm" thesis that pluralism necessarily leads to a decline in religiosity. In fact, the recognition of pluralism and choice may actually strengthen an individual's religious commitments.[2]

Looking specifically at religion in contemporary America, Roof and McKinney (1987) have spoken of a "new voluntarism" in which individuals feel less constrained to maintain their parents' patterns of religiosity, resulting in new heights of denominational switching, especially among Protestants. They also find support for the existence of the new voluntarism in individuals' tendency to pick and choose their own religious practices and beliefs within a religious tradition and to "mix and match" between traditions. This sense of religion as voluntary is further evident in the trend toward viewing religiosity and spirituality as separate from and more important than church attendance. Perhaps the most extreme exemplar of the new voluntarism is Sheila Larson, the woman described by Bellah and his coauthors (1985) in *Habits of the Heart*, who claimed to have her own private religion, which she called "Sheilaism."

Robert Wuthnow (1988) similarly embraces the view of contemporary America as an arena where persons search for individualized meanings they cannot find in their inherited traditions. Comparing the religious scene of the mid-twentieth-century America that Will Herberg described in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1960) with that of the present, Wuthnow and his coauthors (1992) describe a shift from ascription to achievement in American religious identities. In a later book (1998), he argues that Americans have moved from a spirituality of "dwelling" in a prescribed religious space to a spirituality of "seeking." Concomitant with this trend, he suggests, has been a decline in the significance of traditional religious institutions and a proliferation of special purpose groups.

All these authors present a portrait of contemporary Americans as religious seekers engaging in practices through which they enact their freely chosen religious commitments and identities, thereby escaping the limits of ascription. It is possible, then, to see the new voluntarism thesis as consistent with the long-standing sociological tradition of associating premodernity with ascription, structure, and stable identity and modernity with achievement, fluidity, and shifting identities. Identity in modernity has become a project through which individuals cobble together a self out of multiple sources through a process that Lévi-Strauss referred to as *bricolage* ([1962] 1966). Contemporary American

religiosity, then, is an individualistic affair, where no single community defines us. Instead, we draw from multiple sources to construct unique and fluid religious narratives (Ammerman 2003).

The irony here is that if people are free to achieve their religious identities from multiple sources, they are also free to employ their sense of occupying an ascribed status as an integral part of this project. The traditional dichotomy of achievement versus ascription may, in other words, be a false dichotomy. The idea that an individual must choose one value orientation or another implies a view of culture as a uniform, rationally consistent whole. In her oft-cited article "Culture in Action," Ann Swidler (1986) has offered a different conception of culture, in which culture is best understood as a "tool kit," a set of practical social resources people can use to construct strategies of action. In this view, culture is not a rationally organized set of axioms and corollaries but a series of "recipes" that people can draw upon in specific situations (cf. Schutz [1932] 1967). The recipe may make practical sense even when it seems logically impossible. Actually, part of the point is that sometimes the strategies stay the same, even though the situations have changed.

Unsynagogued Jews

In contemporary American society, Jews follow a wide variety of cultural recipes in constructing an identity. Most no longer live in enclosed traditional communities in which an ascribed identity would be logical, yet elements of ascription remain. Those I interviewed do not belong to communities where Jewish ritual practice is essential to community membership or maintained through face-to-face interactions; nevertheless, elements of Jewish ritual practice are present in their lives. The unsynagogued Jews I write about in this chapter are, in fact, structurally situated in a pluralist society that allows them to shift easily between seeing their Jewishness as a matter of choice and seeing it as a matter of ascription. They draw upon various components of the cultural tool kit, some old and some new, to enact a Jewish identity. How is Judaism present in their lives, in spite of their apparent disconnection from a religious community?

Among the ingredients available in the American cultural recipe is, in fact, the presumption of religious choice. To choose to join—or not to join—a synagogue is perfectly "normal" for an American. Scholars who discuss the New Voluntarism often put the word *New* in quotation marks as a way of indicating that there has been a long-standing tradition of voluntarism in American society (Finke and Stark 1992; Roof 1993; Warner 1993; Wuthnow 1998). Compared with Europe, religion in America has always been more pluralistic, more a matter of choice and less a matter of ascription. That this has been the case is a result of the "disestablishment" of religion in the United States (Finke and Stark 1992), but it is also a product of the Protestant habits that shaped American

religiosity. For Protestants, religious identity has always been conceptualized as a matter of choice. In Protestantism, children may grow up in a particular faith tradition, but when they reach a certain age they are expected to decide whether or not to embrace that faith as their own (Wuthnow et al. 1992). The Protestant roots of American society are reflected in the widespread assumption—by the public and scholars alike—that religion *should* be an achieved status, something one chooses.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, has historically been considered an ascribed status—something into which one is born. The term has especially been applied to first-generation immigrants in the United States, who were often attracted to ethnic communities established by people from their own country. In these communities many traditional cultural features such as language, food, and religious traditions were maintained. Among the generations after the immigrants, however, *ethnicity* has become a word that slides on the slippery slope between ascription and achievement. To describe this contemporary phenomenon, Herbert Gans (1979) introduced the concept of "symbolic ethnicity," which attempts to describe a new form of identification that is expressive rather than inherent and institutionally supported. For Gans, symbolic ethnicity represented the evolution of ethnicity from an instrumental necessity into an "identity marker." The new function of ethnicity, in this view, was to give people a hook on which to hang their identities in an increasingly large and impersonal society. Building on the idea of symbolic ethnicity, Mary Waters (1990) emphasized the individual and "optional" nature of this new ethnic form. Ethnicity is still an important component of American identity, according to Waters, but it has become a voluntary, personally chosen identity marker rather than the totally ascribed characteristic it was for the first and some of the second generations of immigrants.

In a later essay Gans (1994), using American Jews as his case study, developed the concept of symbolic religiosity as a way to analyze whether this concept represents a distinct form of identification that centers on religion. He concluded that symbolic religiosity is in the service of symbolic ethnicity and that in the end, for contemporary third or later generations, ethnicity has largely come to replace religion as the focal point of group identification. His concept of symbolic religiosity affirms his and Waters's argument that presumably ascribed ethnic identification is now manifested as a matter of individual choice and allows us to see that presumably ascribed ethnic identification is compatible with choice.

In this chapter I build upon their work by showing that although the unsynagogued Jews I interviewed strongly assert the deeply ascribed nature of their Jewishness, in enacting this identity they clearly perceive it as something freely chosen; their views are thus compatible with the concept of the "new voluntarism."

As members of a religious/ethnic group, Jews have always been something of an anomaly in American society. It often strikes Americans as odd that

an ethnic group could be defined by a presumably achieved characteristic such as religious practice and belief. While most other ethnic groups have been defined in terms of nationality, Jews have been defined in terms of religion, but one that does not conform to Protestant expectations. Although Protestant conventions hold that individuals are not fully a member of a faith tradition until they embrace that tradition, in Judaism a person is considered fully Jewish if his mother is Jewish. (Among contemporary Reform Jews, patrilineal descent is also recognized as a path to membership in the tribe.) Whereas Protestantism sees religious commitment as an individual matter to be worked out between an individual and God, Judaism has traditionally emphasized the importance of a sense of peoplehood. For all American Jews, identities are constructed in this intersection of religious and ethnic expectations.

Unsynagogued Jews, then, represent an interesting "test case" in which to look for choice and ascription, American Protestant voluntarism, and Jewish ethnicity. These are people who have clearly chosen not to practice their religion in a traditional way. Given that they have elected not to join a synagogue, these Jews look like "new voluntarists." If they were like Protestants, we might expect these nonaffiliated Jews to eschew religious identity and practice entirely, to express some vague sense of identification that carries little content, or to be seekers with beliefs and practices selected from across religious traditions. The question is how their choices may be shaped and constrained by the tradition of ascription that is part of Judaism.

Building a Jewish Identity

When sociologists of religion look at people who do not belong to religious institutions, they often ask, "But do they still believe?" That predisposition, like the emphasis on religious choice, reflects the Protestant cultural assumptions behind most of our theories. For Jews, that is not the right question. Judaism privileges practice over belief, so the question to be asked of nonmembers is not whether they believe but whether and how they practice.

In the Jewish tradition, what is most important is not swearing allegiance to a specific creed but rather fulfilling particular ritual obligations, such as observing Yom Kippur (the holiest day of the year), participating in a Passover seder, and celebrating some of the other annual holidays. Throughout the history of Judaism, *halachah* (law) took precedence over belief; a religious Jew was defined as an *observant* Jew, one who accepted the authority of *halachah* and conformed to its dictates. Commentators sometimes prefer to use the term *Orthoprax* rather than *Orthodox,* since what distinguishes Orthodox Jews from others is the extent to which they follow halachic prescriptions about behavior. In the past 150 years, new forms of Jewish observance have emerged, such as those represented by the

Conservative and Reform denominations. Although Reform Jews do not accept the legitimacy of the *halachah*, and Conservatives accept it to varying degrees, members of these denominations nevertheless see performing Jewish rituals, rather than professing particular beliefs, as the essential element of being a Jew.

Reworking Traditional Practices

It is not surprising, then, that the large majority of my respondents told me that they do not believe that Jewish identity hinges upon following or adopting any particular creed. But it is also not surprising that they sought to perform and concretize their Jewish identities through innovative ritual practices, many of which took their shape from the tradition. Many of the practices respondents reported involved well-known Jewish rituals, such as having a special meal on Friday night for Shabbat or attending a Passover seder, rituals that are conducted at home. They told me that, like most other American Jews, they do not perform these practices in halachically prescribed ways. Unlike many American Jews, who might not perform any rituals at all, my respondents created new ways to make the practices compatible with their modern lives. Many spoke quite fondly about rituals (such as Passover seders) they had learned to do with their families, which they wished to hold onto in some way.

What is striking about their Jewish practices is that they did not need to attend religious schools to learn them, and they do not need to belong to a synagogue to practice them. In contrast to the way sociologists of religion have repeatedly focused on institutional belonging and the practice of "religion" in churches, some of the central practices of all Jews take place in the home rather than in any official religious institution. Studying Jews shifts our attention away from religious congregations and organizations as the sites of ritual production toward an analysis of the ways in which religious cultural production happens in families. My respondents emphasized that they maintain certain Jewish traditions because of the warm family memories they evoke.

Women were especially likely to talk about the importance of food in their observance of Shabbat. Special meals were important ways they keep their ethnic identification alive.[3] Two women, for example, specified that they try to keep Friday night as family dinner night. Because they are so tired from the week, however, their ritual is to serve pizza rather than the more traditional home-cooked meal. As Laura,[4] a social worker in her fifties said, "We actually have . . . a year ago we started the ritual of Chinese food every Friday night, because I was too tired to cook dinner on Fridays. My husband declared, now that my oldest daughter is in college, that he's sick of Chinese food, so now, for the past two weeks, the ritual has become pizza." Such a lived religious practice continues the historical notion that Friday night is very important in Jewish religion. Instead of observing it in the halachically prescribed religious way, with blessings over candles, wine,

and challah (a special egg bread served on Shabbat), they reinvented the evening to satisfy their own contemporary professional schedules and evolving familial needs.

In general, my respondents were most likely to take on ethnic practices that particularly involve memory, family, and historical and cultural traditions. For example, they mentioned studying texts, liking Jewish language, songs, and music, displaying Jewish objects in their home, or holding traditional Jewish rituals in nontraditional ways. I heard about conducting Passover seders without necessarily reading from the traditional prayer book or even serving matzo. These unsynagogued Jews freely chose how to practice, but many of the elements they chose were intentionally Jewish. And like other Jews, identity was measured by practice and not belief.

Creating Syncretic Rituals

Sometimes the leap between Jewish religious tradition and contemporary practice was more dramatic. Like most American Jews, my interviewees did not perceive traditional Jewish law as authoritative. As we have seen, they felt completely free to pick and choose their practices from the traditional (now Orthodox) halachic system of ritual observances. But unlike many American Jews whose Jewish identity is not central to their sense of self, my respondents all aimed to achieve a Jewish identity, and to do that they engaged in various forms of innovative ritual practice. Indeed, some even claimed a link between practices derived from other aspects of contemporary culture (such as the New Age), or other religions (such as Eastern traditions), with the ways they construct themselves as Jewishly identified. Here we see an example of the bricolage that Roof, Wuthnow, and others have described as part of the New Voluntarism, but rather than renaming the new religious creation, chosen elements are adopted into an ascribed identity. Although their practices and rituals were not religiously prescribed elements of Jewish traditional observances, it was important to my respondents to represent their observances in ways that marked them as Jewish.

Here we should remember Sara's narrative about climbing the mountain on Yom Kippur, a syncretic blend of deep appreciation of nature and observance of one of the holiest days in the Jewish year. When she said that her appreciation of nature fits in with how life should be lived, she linked this sensibility with "pieces of Judaism" that reflected the value of nature. Her use of this phrase is highly suggestive of Swidler's notion of culture as a tool kit. Here, Sara expressed her understanding that Judaism is not one uniform set of practices and beliefs but rather a tool kit of value orientations about "how life should be lived" that can then resonate with a wide variety of practices. With that tool kit she can by herself construct a meaningful observance of a high holiday.

Thus, I was intrigued that the rabbi's validation was important for her. She recalled running into the Reform rabbi in her community one day in the supermarket:

> I knew him because I was taking a class he offered—and I worked in a retirement community and one of the residents there had given me tickets for the high holy days. I must have mentioned to the rabbi that he had done so, because when I saw the rabbi he said, "I half expected to see you for Rosh Hashanah," and I said, "Rabbi, I did something better and I don't mean to insult you but . . ."

After telling the rabbi the story of her hike in the mountains, she went on, "The rabbi said, 'I don't think I can do better than that. And so you have my blessing to do that on any high holiday that you want,' which I thought was pretty neat." She had clearly chosen a highly unusual and non-orthodox way to observe Yom Kippur, but the measure of the value and legitimacy of her practice depended in part on the rabbi's blessing. Even when they chose to do seemingly secular behaviors, many of these unsynagogued Jews used a Jewish lens through which to define and identify their practices.

Sheryl, a single woman in her thirties, provided an interesting example of such religious bricolage.[5] In response to my question about whether there are any rituals, of any kind, that are important in her life, she said,

> I don't know if you've heard of the book *The Artist's Way*; it's a book to kind of help unblock your creativity, and one of the things that they recommend that you do is morning pages. When you get up in the morning, you write three, nonstop, sort of stream of consciousness to get all that—it's like a brain dump—to get all that stuff that's on your mind out onto the page, and I've been doing that. It's kind of odd. I started doing that, and then I was reading the book about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and somewhere in the book they talked about—at the beginning of the month before Rosh Hashanah—how religious men would get up at midnight and start to pray because that's when their minds would be the most clear. And I realized as I was reading that, I had kind of started my morning papers on the first day of that month. . . . It is a very weird coincidence, and doing them has really made me see a lot more coincidence in my life, and I don't mean necessarily that I believe it's a coincidence. . . . I continue to do this daily; it's like the Jewish morning prayers.

Here Sheryl described an example of a daily ritual practice that she linked with Jewish memory and ritual, although it did not derive from a specifically Jewish source and is in fact related to a practice that only men are commanded to do. She felt free both to take up this ritual and to name it as Jewish.

A Sense of Ascription

Even as these Jews who do not belong to synagogues saw the performance of Jewish ritual practices as a matter of choice and reinterpretation, they felt that being Jewish is not optional. A central way my respondents constructed and represented their identities as Jews was by insisting that their Jewishness is innate and immutable; being Jewish is something one is simply born into. There is a hardwired genetic truth to it. They believed, in the words of one respondent, that they are Jews because they are Jews, period. They insisted that on some level they have no choice at all about their Jewishness—at least as an ethnic, cultural, and historical identity.

There is a fascinating slippage here between ethnicity and biology. Many of my respondents started out defining Judaism, for them, as an ethnic or cultural identity, but when asked to flesh out what they meant by that, they returned to some level of biological essentialism. In my conversation with Mark, I asked, "Is Jewishness, or Judaism, or being Jewish something you're born with?" He responded,

> Yes. Well, I think ethnically, everybody's born Jewish. And I think we know about genetics. Certain things are going to have a tendency to be passed along, like intellect. I mean, we are the people who first created the idea that to be holy you had to be, if you will, cerebral. Or, for another example, there are people who have been Cohens [the name for hereditary members of the priestly caste] for thousands of years. So maybe there is, I don't know, like a collective spirit. Who is it? Was it Jung that talked about that? The idea about collective spirit . . .

Barry, in response to my question of whether being Jewish is something one is born with, said,

> Sure. For me, I have a sense of family, family history, and I would say, Jewish traditions and teachings, although I may not be able to recite them all to you now. And in society at large, I think it is an identification that is ethnic. People look at people and think of them as Jews, whether they're religious or not, people are thought of as Jews because of the ethnic thing and the cultural things.

One particularly sensitive issue in this view of Judaism as an ascribed characteristic is the question of conversion. If Judaism is indeed inborn, can a convert ever truly be a Jew? Belinda, a fifty-year-old businesswoman, expressed this tension as follows: "Well, I don't really think somebody can convert to Judaism. . . . They can convert to the religion, but they can't convert to being a Jew, I don't think." Cindy, a thirty-year-old teacher, similarly expressed uncertainty about the meaning and nature of conversion as an index of "real" Jewish identity. When she told me that she feels she has "something in common with all Jews," I asked her

what that was. She replied, "History, genetics, very specific genetics." Clearly, for Cindy, the essence of being a Jew is the ascriptive, ethnic component—being a member of the tribe is a matter of genetic heritage. When I queried her in return about whether Judaism is something you are born with, she responded in a confused manner: "Unless you convert. There are some people who convert who are more religious than me. But they don't have the genetics and I think that one of the important parts of being Jewish is the genetics. And it can get watered down, and then once it's watered down, it's less Jewish."

The unsynagogued Jews I have been describing appear to be practicing what Gans calls symbolic religiosity and ethnicity. For them, Judaism functioned as a symbolic, cultural, and historical system around which they could center their identities. Being Jewish positions them within American society. Highlighting the genetic dimension of their identities as Jews is a particularly powerful way of claiming a link with a great tradition and people, without having to engage in any particular religious or other behaviors. Nevertheless, they do engage in practices to enact this identity and make it real for themselves and others.

The Limits of Voluntarism

My respondents admitted that they picked and chose the practices through which they performed their Jewishness, but no matter how and whether they perform any Jewish rituals, this is not what defines them as Jewish. Birth does. They represented themselves as members of a biologically distinct "people." In the post-Holocaust era, interestingly, that sense of peoplehood was defined as much by their experience of otherness as by any other aspect of being Jewish. Here I mean a deep sense of social distinction rather than simply physical features. My respondents repeatedly answered questions about the meaning of being Jewish with stories of feeling different from those around them. Karen, a forty-six-year-old reporter, said that being Jewish means "being set apart from other people in some ways." Elaine expressed the identical sentiment: "To be a Jew is to be a perpetual outsider." And Harold told me that part of growing up Jewish is that "it is ingrained in you that you are a minority."

Given that outsiders often view Jews as having "made it" economically and successfully integrated into the mainstream society, why do my respondents cling to this sense of being "other"? These are people, after all, who are several generations past immigrant enclaves, speak English perfectly well, and seem to be fully assimilated Americans. What in their experience makes this story of "otherness" plausible? In spite of economic and social success, Jews *are* set apart from the large majority of Americans. They do not celebrate Christmas or Easter, for instance, marking instead the High Holidays or Passover (even if they do so in nontraditional ways). Especially in the moments when Christian religious practice so obviously defines the culture, Jews are outsiders.

Their sensibility of themselves as "others" in America also derives from their awareness (and in some cases experiences) of discrimination and anti-Semitism. Renee, who grew up in the farmlands of Montana, emphasized that her Jewish identity was strongly defined by her sense of being an outsider. "I felt I was different. There is something about me that is different as is my heritage, my people, and our history. I was the only Jewish girl in my whole school. I think there was one other girl who was dark and had a long nose. The rest were all blond and pug-nosed. So I really always felt like an outsider; they were very good at making me feel that way." In this quotation it is obvious that Renee's sense of having the inborn, embodied characteristics of being Jewish was accompanied by a perception of being different and "other" from the rest of her community. Her treatment by her schoolmates further reinforced this sensibility.

Sheryl, a woman who grew up in Connecticut, developed a similar sense of herself as radically different as a child. She declared,

> I have a huge sense of being different from everyone else. I can remember my mother saying, when we went to school around Christmastime that we could sing the carols except for "Silent Night" and one other religious one, because as Jews we could not sing those. And, being in East Greenwich, where there were very few Jews, and not having a place to go to be Jewish, it was very odd. It made me feel like I belonged nowhere.

Because the sense of being different, an outsider, is so central to the way these Jews construct a Jewish identity, many of my respondents described feeling most Jewish when they found themselves in non-Jewish environments. There they often took on the role of representative Jew. Rather than gaining a Jewish identity by socializing with other Jews, as is commonly asserted in sociological arguments, these unsynagogued Jews gained their sense of Jewishness precisely in their connections with non-Jews. Being different highlighted the importance of their Jewish identity.

My respondents' most profound sense of otherness emerges when they speak of the Holocaust. Both the depth of its horror and its historical proximity result in the Holocaust continuing to play an important role in Jewish identity. Perhaps especially for these Jews, who—like so many of the murdered German Jews—are largely assimilated into secular society, the Holocaust stands as a reminder of the precariousness of their position. In spite of their assimilation, they tenaciously engage in practices that reinforce their Jewish identities.

Many of my respondents perceived the Holocaust as a significant reminder that as Jews they are indeed "other" in physical and characterological traits. They insisted that if a Hitler or some other anti-Semite rose to power, they would be clearly marked as Jews. The Holocaust has become, then, a symbol that provides them with a sense of responsibility to identify as Jews and help ensure Jewish continuity. In the face of such a threat they must identify

with other Jews, proudly proclaiming themselves as members of the tribe. The Holocaust stands as a symbol both of the danger to Jewish survival and of the tenacity of Jewish peoplehood. Being other brings with it both a sense of threat and a commitment to preserve the threatened identity. For example, Susan, a single professor in her late thirties, linked the Holocaust and Jewish survival in describing the meaning of her commitment to being Jewish:

> In my sensibility there is the Holocaust, there is the Inquisition, there are ideas that people died for what I am so that I could be what I am, so therefore there is an obligation to identify with the idea of a people or ethnic or racial or religious or whatever kind of group you want to call it, but you're part of this people, you were born into it.

For my respondents the memory of the Holocaust, repeatedly cited in their narratives of Jewish meaning and identity, functions as a way to assert an ongoing sense of peoplehood and uniqueness, whether they have chosen it or not.

Conclusion

Everyday religion is, for these unsynagogued Jews, both chosen and unchosen, drawn from tradition and improvised, ethnic and religious at the same time. Judaism as a religion has always been intertwined—in the minds of Jews as well as in the general society—with the notion of a Jewish "people." Whether and however they observe specific religious practices, Jews are attached to each other in some essential way. American Protestants can fairly readily shift denominations and change their practices, and so do American Jews. Nevertheless, it is harder for Jews to disentangle themselves from the collective aspects of being Jewish. They are reluctant to renounce a sense of attachment to ancestors, many of whom struggled to remain Jewish in difficult circumstances, to families of origin, and to a sense of the Jewish people worldwide. Jewish traditions, symbols, and myths reflect a sense of historical familism that ties Jewish people to each other by blood, no matter what religious practices they choose.

Perhaps this sense of ascribed ethnicity helps to explain the way these unsynagogued Jews make their religious choices. Like "new voluntarists," they feel free to piece together their own Jewish rituals and identity. They decide which practices to observe; they reinterpret and re-create tradition, and they adopt as "Jewish" all sorts of secular and religious practices. They choose how to be Jewish, but not whether to be. If the new paradigm is taken to entail the notion that contemporary religion is not tribal, then my respondents clearly do not fit the pattern.

I believe that the formulators of the new paradigm have perhaps inadvertently used American Protestants, the dominant religious group in the United States, as their model of religion. Most sociological studies of religion, and the methods used to study religion, have been based on assumptions derived from

Protestant theology and praxis. As the dominant religion in the United States, Protestantism has shaped sociological study, often presuming to stand for religion in general. These unsynagogued Jews suggest that questions about everyday religion should pay attention to practice as well as belief and to the complicated intermingling of ethnicity and religion that is increasingly common among immigrant Americans. For instance, *desi* (second-generation Indians), like Jews, have religious and ethnic identities that are interwoven. Even as they choose their ways of being Hindu and American, what might that tell us about the New Voluntarism paradigm as currently formulated?

The problem is not with the observations of the new paradigm authors. They are describing real trends in American religiosity. Rather, the problem has been the tendency within the sociological tradition to characterize achievement and ascription as opposite ways of living in the world. My respondents show us that lived culture is not a logical syllogism. It may not be rational for people to claim that certain characteristics are innate at the same time that they are consciously choosing how to define them. Nevertheless, the narratives of these unsynagogued Jews reveal that culture is better understood as the tool kit of repertoires described by Swidler than as the logically coherent packages of values described by Parsons and others. My respondents are capable of moving easily between the discourses of ascription and achievement. Their everyday religion exists in a world of religious and secular choices, but it is a way of being "religious" that is shaped both by the particular patterns laid down by Jewish traditions and by the realities of otherness. It is both chosen and not chosen. This chapter represents one step toward building a theoretical understanding that moves beyond such either-or dichotomies.

NOTES

1. Lazerwitz and associates (1998) report that 16% of American Jews never attend synagogue and 15% report no denominational preference. Another 35% attend only once or twice a year.

2. See, for example, Finke and Stark (1992), Roof (1993; 1999), Roof and McKinney (1987), Smith (1998), and Wuthnow (1988, 1998).

3. Here they parallel the cultural work being done by immigrant women who organize meals in their religious communities (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 1999).

4. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

5. Some of the examples in this section are also found in Davidman (2003).

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4

Religion, Twice Removed: Exploring the Role of Media in Religious Understandings among "Secular" Young People

Lynn Schofield Clark

Judgment Day, you don't go straight to heaven or straight to hell. . . . It's when Jesus is going to come out of the sky and then he's going to take everybody up there who qualifies. I don't know. *What Dreams May Come*, I think that is what I want my heaven to be like: whatever it is you enjoy will be there and you can see all the people you know that died.

—Nina, an African American/Native American fifteen-year-old whose lower-income family regularly attended a Baptist church

My view on Catholicism, I know this is off on a tangent, but it just kind of always freaked me out. I had nightmares for years about Jesus on the crucifix because you know, you think the Garden of Eden is supposed to be beautiful but then you look at these horrible images, like [the film] *Stigmata*. . . . And Jesus went through tons of torture. That is just really scary. So, watching *Stigmata* and *Passion of the Christ* reminds me of religion.

—Maria, a multiracial fifteen-year-old from an upper-income family who had limited experiences with formal religion

How do young people learn about what happens when we die? What do they think of when asked about their religious or spiritual beliefs? For many young people in the United States, religious organizations

continue to provide a framework for understanding themselves in relation to the world and the place of both God and themselves in it. Yet young people inside and outside religious traditions, like people of all ages, also inadvertently draw upon many other cultural resources that provide shape, texture, and imagery to what can be highly abstract understandings concerning the religious realm and our relationships to it. This chapter explores how popular entertainment media, such as films and television programs, provide one source of such cultural resources for young people's understandings of religion and spirituality. It explores the ways in which young people, particularly those with limited religious backgrounds, construct identity narratives of religion with religious stories that are twice removed: originally told and recorded by a religious group (often already removed from their original contexts) to form a core of understandings for that group; then taken out of a religious context entirely and utilized in the popular media's fictional accounts of novels, films, and television programs; and, finally, borrowed by young people from the popular media as they seek to express orally their own understandings and commitments regarding religion.

Over the last several years, I have been exploring the ways teens draw on narratives from the entertainment media when constructing their own religious or spiritual identities. My research team and I have done close to 430 in-depth interviews with teens, members of their families, and people in their friendship circles. I have also looked at the media that teens consume, focusing specifically on films and television programs that appeal to teens.[1]

For the majority of youth in the United States, participation in traditional religious organizations presumably provides a set of materials for the construction of a religious identity.[2] But for some teens, religious institutions and orthodox beliefs have little direct impact. These teens would be counted as "secular" by many measures, but I am interested in the gray area between the "religious" and the "secular." I wanted to pay particular attention to the growing numbers of young people who, for example, might claim that they believe in God but do not go to church or temple. They themselves resist the idea that they are "secular." This chapter argues that we should pay attention to the ways such youth construct beliefs and practices, how they negotiate among the ideas and images that come from traditional religious institutions, from the stories and experiences evoked by popular media, and from their own everyday lives.

This chapter therefore presents an analysis of the narratives of seventy-one young people between the ages of eleven and twenty who are "not-so-religious." These teens have little or no connection to traditional religious institutions and do not describe themselves as especially religious, although they are not hostile to religion either. In the larger sample, there are other teens, by contrast, who were involved in religious organizations and identified themselves with those

traditions in significant ways. There were a very few who were adamantly opposed to religion, and a few who not only were not very religious but had too little to say about the topic to be reviewed here, and thus their stories are not included in this analysis. The seventy-one teens whose stories are examined were not-so-religious but nevertheless did talk about the spiritual content of the media they consumed, allowing us to look at how they view religion and spirituality, the secular and the spectacular, in relation to their everyday lives.

Thinking about Religion and the Media

All cultures provide their participants with a range of narratives and artifacts that articulate a particular "structure of feeling" that captures something of that time and place (Williams 1961). At a particular moment in history, cultural resources—from the folk to the highly commercial—become part of the taken-for-granted "strategies of action" that inform how each of us reacts to life (Swidler 1986). Those cultural resources and strategies of action are given shape by our gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, labor, nationality, and racial/ethnic background, among other things. But they are also given shape and content by a culture's popular media. Media provide an accessible language resource as people strive to articulate to others what they find to be meaningful or banal, good or bad, hateful or compassionate in the world around them.

Sometimes, people draw upon the "language" of the popular media in ways that are unexpected or resistant to culturally dominant ideas (Fiske 1987). They might find in a film about a factory worker support for their own beliefs in the importance of unions, for example, even when the film itself does not offer any overt support for such a position and most people would not make a connection between that particular film and the issue of unionized labor. While theoretically interesting for the discussion of how popular culture can be interpreted counterhegemonically, such "resistant" readings have been hard to find in actual practice. More often, people talk about media in ways that are not too far outside cultural norms, as films and television programs tend to echo rather than subvert dominant ideas (Morris 1990). They have to do so in order to gain the interest and attention of the paying audience. Media, and popular entertainment media in particular, have an inherent tendency to stay within the bounds of the assumptions and beliefs that are taken for granted, or hegemonic, in society. How people choose to talk about the media provides clues to how they see themselves in relation to the taken-for-granted, or hegemonic, norms of society (Gramsci 1971; Hall 1980).

The media therefore become implicit (and sometimes explicit) resources identifying and elaborating what a culture expects of itself. And that includes its expectations about religion. There are historically and culturally defined limits on the discourses available for talk about the religious—discourses that

are echoed and reinforced in the popular media. Media participate in defining and reinforcing what can count as religion and what should be seen as outside the bounds of religion or spirituality. Media give people stories and examples that provide the arena in which this "boundary work" can be done. Talking about popular media representations of religion and the spiritual gives us a window on how teens relate to hegemonically accepted views of religion. Listening to how they talk about themes related to ultimate existence and the cosmos, about stories of the supernatural and paranormal, may reflect back something of the store of religious cultural resources that span the boundaries between institutional and popular forms of religious practice.

In earlier work (Clark 2003b), I argued that the media—including television, film, music, teen magazines, video games, the Web, and more—draw upon and circulate popular religion's tropes and narratives in recognizable ways. For example, consider the popular video games Diablo, Diablo II, and Diablo III. In each of these games, teens battle on the side of angels against demons in a struggle to decide the fate of all creation. Although traditionally defined religious images are present, so too are images and experiences that evoke and combine with a more amorphous popular spirituality. Players of the Diablo games seek "sanctuary" in "shrines," for example, but other elements of play are less clearly related to Christological ideas. For instance, players learn to cast spells, employ curses, and gain expertise in the martial arts. To make sense of these games, teens therefore draw upon knowledge from a variety of sources about the supernatural realm, because this product itself draws upon many such sources.

The genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy (of which Diablo is a part) have long held special appeal among teens. Fantastic stories of the supernatural from the entertainment media are often concerned with the question, "What if these things are true?" The way these genres raise this "what if?" question combines the central questions of many world religions with what some might call "superstition." What if there are good and evil forces beyond the control of individual humans (such as angels, demons, ghosts, or even aliens)? What if beings from the realm beyond can provide assistance to those on earth (such as God, angels, saints, or ghosts of the deceased)? What if humans can harness that power from the realm beyond (through prayer, meditation, séances, telepathy, or contact with aliens)? This is part of the appeal shared by early twenty-first-century popular television, films, and video game fare as diverse as *Touched by an Angel*, *The X-Files*, Diablo, *The Matrix*, and *Joan of Arcadia*. Each addresses the mysteries of the realm beyond and presents a myth that, although fictional, draws upon these important questions in intriguing ways.

The "what if?" spirituality of popular media both echoes and transcends the more "official" accounts of how the world works. An important theme in this fare is a concern with the insidiousness of evil and the imminent apocalypse, a concern that clearly echoes Protestant evangelicalism's account of the present and future. But we also see at work here the postmodern sense that the

metanarratives of both science and religion should be questioned. Taken for granted in these "what if?" stories is the idea that the question is unanswerable, or at least not definitively so.[3] This is a theme that resonates well among some young people in a generation largely defined by its religious pluralism and multiculturalism, a generation introduced to many different ways of seeing the world and, as a result, a generation in which some are less likely to want to make (or easily accept) sweeping claims of certainty. The beliefs about the supernatural that many associate with the entertainment realm, then, are not somehow separate from religious traditions and larger spiritual quests. On the contrary, the continuing relationship between media and religion affirms just how deeply embedded these traditions—both formally and "popularly" religious—are in U.S. culture.

Of course, in most cases religion, and even the "what if?" invoked in the popular media, are not the "point" of the story; they are part of the backdrop that helps to construct the story's myth. To take one example, many saw *The Sixth Sense* as a brilliant horror movie about the restless undead and the unwanted psychic ability to communicate with them, but the scenes in and around churches heightened the awareness of the alternative that death could be associated with sanctuary and peace. That film and others like it employ religious imagery to deepen an association rather than to comment on religion per se.

There are very pragmatic reasons for the inclusion of references to the "what if?" questions in today's teen media, however. Horror and fantasy have long been profitable sources of revenue with the teen audience, and the teen audience's significant buying power makes it an especially desirable market. As an added bonus for the media industries, young people tend to consume popular media texts more than once. Supernatural and fantasy worlds have long been popular with those at a particular developmental stage in which they desire more power than they feel they will ever have. It is not surprising, then, that these have become verdant genres in an increasingly demographically niched entertainment industry, all the more powerful since entertainment is the second largest U.S. export after defense.

Listening to the Teens

In the welter of images available to them, what sorts of stories do teens tell about their worlds? For some teens, the story is one dominated by the presence of evil in the world. They pick up on what I have come to call the "dark side of evangelicalism," that aspect of popular culture in which popular religion's spiritualism, suspicion, and skepticism toward institutions are expressed through stories of demons, hell, the devil, and punishment from the realm beyond.

I first began to identify this story in a young woman named Nancy. I met Nancy and her mother, Sarah Donahue, through a mutual friend and then

interviewed her and several of her friends who were living in Nancy's mother's house. They had all been raised in an environment of financial and social disadvantage. Additionally, all of these Anglo-American young people had had some experience of interrupted adolescence more or less related to their lower socioeconomic status. Nancy was a teen mother; Jodie, Carl, and Mickey were high school dropouts who had had employment on and off; and Eric had been incarcerated. At age twenty, Nancy had just graduated from an alternative high school after having dropped out twice to give birth. Because she still lived in her mother's home and was dependent on her both financially and socially, her experience, as well as that of her friends, was closer to adolescence than to adulthood in several ways.

All of these youth voiced nonconventional views about religion. All had had some contact with Christianity during childhood, but Nancy, like her friends Jodie and Eric, had no interest in organized religion today. Several of them believed, however, that they had had personal encounters with the supernatural realm. Nancy told a story of having been comforted by what she believed was the sighting of a guardian angel. She also spoke with concern about possible punishment that might await her in the realm beyond. Eric, too, was very familiar with the categories of traditional religion and did not completely eschew them. When Eric was asked the question, "Can you think of a time when a TV program you were watching dealt with religion?" he nodded enthusiastically, and said, "A *lot*." Jodie, who was participating in that particular interview, agreed, mentioning *Warlock* as one movie with religious themes. Eric then added that *Spawn*, in his words, "deals a lot with religion." *Spawn*, he explained, is a very graphic and violent program in which, he said, "a guy dies and makes a deal with the devil that he'll come back." When asked how it dealt with religion, Eric replied, "It deals with the negative aspect. There's a lot of evil stuff in it. It deals with evil, and hell, and Satan." In a later interview, when Jodie was asked what television program was most like her own beliefs, she replied, "It would have to be *The X-Files*. Because, no matter what anybody says . . . I've seen everything that everyone's compiled together about aliens. There's no doubt in my mind that we are not the only intelligent life. And *X-Files*, it's just—God was a higher being. How do we know he wasn't an alien? On *X-Files*, Mulder, he would say something like that, 'How do we know God's not an alien?' " Jodie, when asked about her beliefs, spoke of alien abductions and spirits of the deceased. But she also spoke about God as understood in a more traditional framework. "I gotta say if there's a God, he's very cruel," she said. "If there is a God, then why doesn't he like me now?"

Here were beliefs that seemed clearly rooted in entertainment, existing side by side with claims that seemed to reference religion in more traditional ways. And the story they wove together was one in which demons play at least as large a role as angels, where God is absent or cruel. A total of fourteen teens in the overall sample of seventy-one not-so-religious teens brought up these

kinds of stories when they were asked about religion in relation to the media. This group of teens seemed to view religion and the realm beyond in terms of the supernatural and the spectacular more than the spiritual. Nevertheless, their emphasis on evil in the world sounded very much like opinions expressed by teens with strong commitments to conservative Protestantism. Both groups told stories about the reality of evil, and both had the sense that participating in evil in this world—or even just participating in bad behaviors—might result in cosmic consequences in the next.

Despite these religious resonances, these teens seemed drawn to the "dark side" more out of a desire for titillation than out of religious fear. They were approaching stories about the supernatural largely out of a desire for entertainment rather than for religious, cosmological, or existential information. These teens apparently were not very interested in religion at all. They were more or less "secular," in that their primary concerns were with what Giddens (1991) has called "practical mastery" in their day-to-day lives. These teens are not self-consciously assembling and articulating a set of religious practices as "modern mystics" (Bender, this volume) or as "seekers" (Lövheim, this volume; Roof 1999; Smith and Denton 2005). The fourteen teens in this category might better be referred to as the "not-seekers."

Yet what is interesting to me is that rather than distancing themselves from all things religious, these teens articulated a mix of views, freely incorporating the importance of "nature," an interest in fate, a "what if?" view of aliens, reference to Zen or God as "energy," and even citing basketball as a spiritual practice. At the same time that they were asserting that they were not interested in religion and were not spiritual seekers, they seemed determined to construct narratives of themselves as at least not not-religious or spiritual, either.

There were other not-so-religious teens who could be characterized as "not-seekers" who formed a sort of mirror image of the "dark-siders" in their attraction to the "light" side. These teens, like those drawn to the "dark side," were also not very interested in religion and had little contact with formal religious organizations. Yet they liked angels and spoke with enthusiasm about prayer, God, morality, and the Bible, and as such voiced the "moralistic therapeutic deism" that Smith and Denton (2005) found to be common among both religious and not-so-religious teens. These young people talked about their views using elements drawn from television programs like *Touched by an Angel* and *Seventh Heaven* and generally did not reference the same horror or afterlife-related elements cited by the "dark-siders." Some of these teens claimed that they were spiritual, although not all did so unequivocally. There were seventeen in the sample of seventy-one who spoke in this way.

Amber Vincent was one teen who articulated the "light side." Like Nancy Donahue, she grew up in a home with a single parent. And similar to Nancy, she went to church only rarely and had little interest in religion. She never talked with her friends about anything related to religion or spirituality and

said that if she received an e-mail that had some reference to Jesus Christ—even if it was a joke—she would delete it immediately, as the reference itself was a turnoff. Occasionally she attended a Lutheran church with her cousins, but once when she went to a different Protestant church with a friend, she found that "they totally dissed other people's religions," and she decided she would not go back to that church.

Although religion did not play much of a role in Amber's life, she did identify herself as "very spiritual," noting that she prayed every morning and night and had read books on self-development. "I've always been seeking a higher life, growth, understanding," she noted. She had read what she described as Christian books on self-development as well as those from "other philosophies." She described her religious beliefs as consistent with some of the basic tenets of Christianity: "I believe in, like the Christian theory of Jesus and stuff. But I just don't believe in everything they think is right. . . . I believe if you're a bad person, you won't go to heaven. And I believe there is a heaven. So, yeah . . . you should be a good person."

When asked about whether or not she ever sought out anything spiritual in television or in the movies, she noted that she was a fan of *Charmed*, a fantasy television program centering on young women with special powers of witchcraft who often employed those powers to act as guardian angels for those around them. "It's a show about witches, and you're relating it to spirituality?!" her stepmother asked her incredulously when Amber mentioned *Charmed*. "Yeah," Amber replied defensively, " 'cause it is [related]." Unable or unwilling to articulate how *Charmed* related to spirituality, however, Amber went on to talk about her fascination with the religions of ancient Egypt and with the Holocaust. It may be that the connection between spirituality and *Charmed* had to do with the positive use to which supernatural powers were put in the program, or the fact that many episodes focus on female empowerment and overcoming obstacles, or something else that related spirituality to the vaguely positive message so central to that popular teen program.

In other discussions of *Charmed*, Amber took a nonchalant approach to this line of questioning, noting that she would enjoy reading about how others related the program to religion or spirituality, but would not pursue the matter any further. As is true with interviews, it is difficult to say whether or not her "fascinations" with religious systems and the supernatural realm actually translate into anything beyond entertainment-related interest. In that sense, her stance toward religion may be more similar to Nancy's than at first it appears.

Amber Vincent differed from Nancy Donahue, however, in one significant way: whereas Nancy's life experiences were colored by the economic difficulties she had faced, Amber led a life rich with privilege. She divided her time between her mother's and her father's upscale homes that were replete with well-appointed furnishings. When she was sixteen, her father had purchased a new sports car for

her so that she could begin to drive herself to the exclusive high school she attended. Amber had not encountered many difficulties in her life, taking her privilege in stride. Like the teens drawn to the "dark side," Amber and other "light side" teens seemed to believe that there was a relationship between religion and the afterlife. Yet the "light side" teens tended to discuss this more in terms of rewards in heaven than punishment in hell. Unlike those who spoke of the "dark side," these teens seemed comforted by a sense of security when they spoke of the realm beyond.

It is not possible to discern conclusively whether these views of religion, and the use of popular culture's narratives to discuss them, correlated with socioeconomic factors. It was not unusual to see this relationship in the interviews conducted for this study, but taking a "dark side" or "light side" view was not predictably related to economic background. The quotations from Nina and Maria that opened this chapter illustrate "dark side" views from two very different teens. Clearly, however, the "light" or "dark" views that young people articulated did seem to echo their parents' beliefs about and experiences with organized religion. It is worth noting that several of the teens who most clearly articulated either "dark" or "light" views had parents who had had some involvement with conservative Protestant or Catholic Christianity, traditions with vivid representations of eternal rewards and punishments.

In spite of their broad appropriation of religious ideas, light-side teens like Amber do not seem to be interested in institutional religion. They are convinced that religion is "confining" and intolerant. Several of these "not-seekers" voiced the importance of tolerance for persons of different racial/ethnic groups and religions. Like many of the Internet participants Lövheim describes, they define *religion* in terms borrowed from the Enlightenment as the opposite of open-minded and tolerant (see Lövheim, this volume). In rejecting "religion," then, these teens are taking their cues from a cultural narrative shaped by antagonism between Christianity and Enlightenment philosophy.

That these light-siders and dark-siders are inadvertently operating with motifs largely defined by Christianity is further supported by the fact that none of the Jewish or Muslim teens tell their stories this way. Some of them are participating in their own traditions and using those traditions to narrate their lives. But the others who were less committed to their home traditions responded to media images of the supernatural in ways quite different from the teens who freely mix media spectacle with Christian mythology.

They were part of the several other patterns that emerged in the conversations with teens about religion and media. There were twenty-one teens who were not at all interested in religion, the spiritual, the spectacle, or the supernatural. These might be termed the *true secularists*. A few of these teens noted that they were turned off when they saw Christianity in popular media, and a few found affirmation in the media for their secularism. Two teens spoke of

conversations they had had with friends about Jody Foster's secular scientist in the film *Contact*, for example. But for the most part, these teens were not interested in religion at all, rarely noticed any reference to religion or spirituality in the media, and never talked about the topic with anyone. Some even expressed that they were appalled or found it humorous that others believed in a supernatural realm or God.

We might not be surprised to find "true secularists" among teens who have little actual contact with organized religion, but their views are remarkably similar to those voiced by a distinct subset of teens who are involved in religious participation. Twelve teens who were being forced to go to church, temple, or mosque seemed to be having negative experiences there. In a few cases, the interview itself had been viewed by the parents as an opportunity to engage the young person in a conversation about his or her irreligious choices, and, not surprisingly, some teens therefore resented having to participate in the interview altogether. Many in this group chose to say little about religion, offering views that ranged from a shrug of boredom to mild annoyance at their parents' choices to downright hostility about all things having to do with religion. Some of these teens might find some meaning in their faith tradition in the future, but it seemed that several were on their way to becoming "true secularists" as adults.

Finally, there were a few teens who come close to being seekers. Only three teens could be grouped here. All of them happen to be Anglo-American females, over fifteen, and from relatively affluent backgrounds. For this group, religion was not of great concern, but they were interested. They wanted to explore alternatives to what their parents believe, or do not believe, and had taken some initiative to engage in alternative religious practices or had begun to investigate doing so. Like the teens drawn to the "dark side" or the "light side" of the supernatural world, these teens shared an interest in what might be possible in the realm beyond. They were willing to entertain the "what if?" questions and enjoyed programs and films that were open to this kind of exploration. They, however, had taken more interest in seeking out information about religion than the not-seekers who similarly voiced "light" or "dark" views.

Understanding Not-So-Religious Teens

Religious and spiritual, supernatural and spectacular—the images supplied by popular entertainment media draw on a wide array of cultural sources for a multitude of motives. There are images borrowed from traditional institutional religion and stories that borrow from "superstitions." There are narratives that mirror Christian theology and spaces for postmodern speculation—all aimed at a teen audience that is imagining "what if?" This is the cultural language available as teens make their own sense of the world.

Are these not-so-religious young people "secular" because they do not participate in formal religion? Previous survey research might have classified them as such. Is the alternative to call them "religious" or "spiritual," although many would eschew those labels? Just what do they tell us about how we define religion in a culture saturated with fantastic stories? Why do so many of them freely and energetically explore the "what if?" world of the entertainment media? And why do many of them seem to resist giving an utterly secular account of themselves? Why is it that the teens I interviewed who were only marginally interested in religion used recognizably religious discursive categories when discussing their beliefs?

First, it seems undeniable that many of these not-so-religious teens inhabit a world that is widely open to stories that go well beyond what Enlightenment science would allow. They are, in some sense, spiritual. For those open to this world of spirit and fantasy, what they appropriate from the media is very likely to be shaped by and mixed with traditional Christian images. Young people, even those at some distance from particular religious traditions, pick up on the fact that there is some relationship between these backdrop representations of the fictional supernatural and what they have learned about "religion," be it theirs or someone else's. Even without any institutional religious connection, these teens share in a world of Christian symbols and stories. What we do not know is how such tacitly held religious beliefs might be mobilized in politics or other cultural arenas. Because people like these teens are typically counted as secular, we miss the ways in which fragments of religious beliefs, stories twice removed, may still have effects.

What we also miss is their negotiation of what it means to be secular. For some teens it means to be tolerant and enlightened. But for others, something about being secular is worth resisting. Many of these not-so-religious teens not only articulate their views within the themes and discourses of Protestant Christianity but also adopt a cultural equation between "religion" and "morality" (Ammerman 1997). Teens, like those of other ages, implicitly associate secularism with immorality. They seem to understand what surveys show—that atheists tend to constitute the least trusted category on social desirability scales. Thus, teens who claim interest in beliefs that are not consistent with organized religion, as well as teens who claim no interest in organized religion itself, may use religious language and images as means of identifying themselves as good moral people.

Despite their decline in cultural authority, Christian religious institutions still lay claim to a hegemonically defined understanding of morality—one that often reinscribes white middle-class experiences as normative. Because religion and morality are closely entwined in U.S. culture, it may be impossible to separate the two in any discussion of self-identification with religion or spirituality. Regardless of what one thinks about the plausibility of religious, spectacular, or supernatural stories, disassociating oneself from them is difficult.

We have here a paradox. Young people want to self-identify as moral, so they lay claim to religious discourse. Yet because of the decline in the cultural authority of religious institutions, the discourse they claim comes to them "twice removed" in the fantasies of the entertainment world. Many feel no need to self-identify with religious institutions but freely experiment with stories and ideas that bear vague resemblance to the narratives they might hear if they did.

This paradox suggests significant gaps in the ways researchers do their work. We need to create research instruments that open up the boundary between the religious and the secular. We need ways to assess the spiritual, the supernatural, and the role of the spectacle (or commodified culture) in extending the hegemonic aspects of Christianity in Western culture. Hegemony always rests on what is assumed to be true, what we may therefore have ignored in the past. For many researchers new questions and new methods may also mean recognizing the extent to which our own presuppositions are shaped by that same culture. Examining the cultural work being done by not-so-religious teens has allowed us to leave some of those presuppositions behind long enough to explore questions of the religious, the secular, the spectacle, and the spiritual in the specific historical, cultural, and ideological contexts in which they are unfolding today.

NOTES

1. In other publications, I have explored how parents have approached the media as a potential resource as they seek to inculcate their faith tradition into the lives of their children (Clark, 2003a). In this chapter I want to explore further what I think is probably the primary contribution of my first book to the debates of secularization: contradictions that emerged as young people who were not very religious in the traditional measures of attendance, participation, beliefs, or practices nevertheless constructed narratives of their beliefs and practices in ways that borrowed from both traditional and popular religion, sometimes in surprising ways.

2. According to Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, three-quarters of U.S. teens between thirteen and seventeen years old are Christian, divided evenly between Protestant and Catholic. Their nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290 English- and Spanish-speaking teenagers between thirteen and seventeen found that faith was an important matter for about half of U.S. teens, and not particularly important for the other half. Interestingly, however, Smith and Denton found that even among teenagers for whom faith was important, many young people had difficulty articulating both the substance of their beliefs and the relevance of those beliefs upon their actions.

3. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) has argued that since World War II, we have witnessed an "incredulity toward metanarratives," which might include those of both science and of religion. There are no more universally accepted truths, he argues, nor are there objective places from which one might evaluate one claim to truth over another. Whether or not Lyotard's arguments for the postmodern condition are as universal as claimed, it seems clear that it is no longer possible to assume that one body of experts,

such as scientists or theologians, might be said to agree consensually on "truth." Nor is it possible to imagine that pronouncements of "truth" from such groups would be automatically afforded legitimacy among a majority of those in the United States.

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5

Virtually Boundless?: Youth Negotiating Tradition in Cyberspace

Mia Lövheim

For a long time, sociologists of religion have assumed that the religious beliefs and practices promulgated by families, traditional religious organizations, and dominant religious cultures were the best predictors of the beliefs and practices of those who grow up in them. Through socialization, such conventions about religion would structure what it means to be religious throughout a person's life. A corollary, of course, is that if families, religious institutions, and cultures become too fragmented, individuals would have difficulties finding religious meaning.

Although this basic pattern still retains explanatory significance, studies of religion in late modern society[1] show that the situations in which young people grow up, as well as the religious beliefs and practices that they encounter, are increasingly complex and shifting. Young people's lives are shaped by daily interactions with different ways of understanding religious symbols and practices. Media, popular culture, and interactions with family members and peer groups present an unprecedented variety of lifestyles and backgrounds. In this situation, religious conventions based on the traditional beliefs and practices of institutionalized religion seem bound to crumble, even become obsolete. In this chapter I will discuss how such conventions—despite these anticipations—nevertheless emerge in discussions of religion on the Internet among young Swedish people, and how they may affect their construction of religious meaning.

Attitudes toward Religion in Sweden

Sweden is often categorized as one of the most secularized and postmodern countries in the world (Pettersson 2000). If there is a "test case" for the breakdown of traditional modes of religious socialization, this would be it. A recent survey aiming to map "the religious Sweden" (Skog 2001)[2] showed that during a regular weekend around 5 percent of the population engage in religious activities supplied by organized religions.[3] The survey confirms that the supply of religion is largely dominated by institutionalized Christianity, especially the Lutheran Church of Sweden and the other officially recognized Swedish denominations. These institutions have a long historical presence in Swedish society,[4] and they still provide 80 percent of all activities during regular weekends. The activities they supply, however, are consumed by a tiny proportion of the population, and the number of people who agree with traditional Christian beliefs is correspondingly small. About 20 percent believe in the existence of a personal God, and less than half of these believe in Jesus Christ or that the Bible is the word of God (Botvar 2000). Thus, the number of people who represent "traditional religion"—that is, whose religious life is expressed in institutionalized religious beliefs and practice—is clearly a minority group in modern Swedish society.

The religious life of the majority of the population is still scarcely explored. We know that a few of them join religious groups that present alternatives to churches and denominations. In addition, immigrant religions such as Islam or Buddhism and new religious movements gather a few—a mere 5 percent of those who regularly take part in organized religion (Skog 2001). Some studies point to an increasing interest in a more broadly defined supernatural realm, not least among young people (cf. Sjödin 2001), and a majority of these people have some sort of belief in a spiritual dimension or a "force of life" (Botvar 2000). A few studies have used interviews and observations to explore the empirical reality behind these numbers (cf. Bromander 1998; Reimers 1995; Hamberg 1989). They indicate that experiences and events that evoke transcendent meaning for these people are handled through an individually constructed, loosely organized, heterogeneous mixture of beliefs and practices often referred to as being "religious in my own way." Two key elements in this "personal religion" are that religion is supposed to be kept a private thing, and that everybody has the right to believe in their own way as long as it does not interfere with other people (Hamberg 1989).

Still, institutionalized religion seems to matter, even for people who are "religious in my own way." Around 85 percent of the population remains members of the Church of Sweden, and a majority of these attend at least occasionally. Primarily, they turn to the church for family celebrations and in national crises. As argued by the Swedish scholar Anders Bäckström (2000), traditional,

institutionalized religion represented by Christian churches still functions as an "arena" for handling existential concerns and collective values. Through rituals and diaconal work, religious institutions can provide a meaningful context for experiences of changes in life, connecting these experiences to something transcending the individual (see also Davie 2000).

Studies of young people's attitudes toward religion show similar tendencies of a strongly declining yet lingering significance of traditional religion. Although the numbers are decreasing, around 40 percent of teenagers still have contacts with Christian churches and denominations through confirmation classes (Sjöborg 2001). Church attendance and belief in traditional Christian teachings are, however, less frequent among the young than in older segments of the population. Young people are no less likely to believe in the existence of a transcendent being or sphere, and some studies even claim to detect an increasing interest in religion among young people (cf. Sjödin 2001; Hagevi 2002). However, young people's ideas about the transcendent are more in line with the immanent, individualistic values and norms of being "religious in my own way" (Sjödin 2001; Bromander 1999).

Ironically, the concept "religion" seems to be closely associated in young people's minds with "traditional" and institutionalized religion, especially the (Christian) "Church." Kerstin von Brömssen's study (2003) of how pupils talk about religion in a multicultural world shows how young people separate their own beliefs and lives from this "religion" (cf. Sjödin 2001). Especially among ethnic Swedish teenagers, "religion" is described as premodern, antiscience, infantile, and enforcing beliefs (von Brömssen 2003, 343). Religion is a "system" that limits their possibilities of self-realization and free choice. If religion is to have any meaning for them, it has to come from "within." Religion is also used as a category for distinguishing themselves from people of other ethnic backgrounds (340).

Approaching Tradition in Modern Religion—in Theory

These studies show how the meaning of religion in Sweden seems to be constructed in a tension between "traditional religion"—largely dominated by beliefs and practices upheld by institutionalized Christianity—and "religion in my own way." This personalized religion is formed around individual needs and rights, but it still keeps a somewhat paradoxical relation to "traditional religion" (cf. Pettersson 2000). In this tension, conventions of what religion "is" and how to be "religious" are formed. These conventions may not have the stability of the "unified system" shared by those who "adhere" to the church, as posited in Durkheim's classic definition of religion ([1912] 1995, 62). However, they do not seem to be shattered and ambivalent enough to set the concept of religion totally "adrift from its former points of anchorage" (Beckford 1989,

170). Rather, it seems as though the personal mix of beliefs and practices described as "religious in my own way" becomes *religious* not just because it fulfills functions of constructing existential meaning and organizing life. It is also seen as religious because it is related to beliefs and practices that have been given a religious meaning by a tradition and a collective of believers. Being "religious in my own way" is thus constructed through negotiation between elements that imply a more institutionalized tradition and the needs and circumstances of an individual's daily life. As exemplified by the young people in von Brömssen's study, the meaning of religion must also be negotiated against the claims of other, competing discourses such as science and religious traditions other than Christianity.

This understanding of how religion is conceived in late modern Sweden fits Nancy Ammerman's (2003) discussion of religious identity as constructed in the intersections between "public narratives" and individual "autobiographies." The former are publicly constructed and shared "accounts" of belonging and meaning that are attached to groups, cultures, and institutions in society. "Religious narratives" are those that invoke the "co-participation of transcendence or Sacred Others" for making meaning of individual lives and social relations (Ammerman 2003, 216). In discussing how these narratives form social interaction, Ammerman describes how symbols and practices in which experiences of the transcendent have been institutionalized, through particular religious institutions and traditions, become carriers of religious conventions also in other settings. Thus, religious identities are both "structured and constructed," patterned by existing scripts *and* improvised according to individual needs and experiences (215).

This linking of religious tradition with modern expressions of religion is also discussed by the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000), who argues that religion as a form of meaning making is distinguished by the connection between individual meaning and the "legitimizing authority of a tradition" or a particular "chain of belief" (82, 83).[5] As she points out, however, modern society implies a fundamental reworking of the individual's relation to tradition (165–67). The legitimizing authority of the tradition is now more than before a matter of individual choice and degree of commitment, and the ways in which a tradition can become "invoked" can appear limitless. Thus, religious traditions are subjected to ongoing construction and reconstruction by human subjects. Still, the history of the tradition or "narrative" can have the power to structure how it will be used—if not by explicit control, then by more implicit rules and sociocultural mechanisms (cf. Ammerman 2003, 222).

Both of these approaches represent an understanding of the place of religious tradition in modern individuals' lives that I find fruitful for studying how young people understand the meaning of religion in their own lives and relations to other people. In order to understand more of the interplay between individual

meaning making and religious traditions described in these approaches, however, we need to look into the conditions of specific situations or sites. In the following sections, I will describe how young people negotiate conventions about "traditional religion" in discussions that take place on the Internet. I will focus on how these can structure, but also be reconstructed by, these young people.

The Internet as a Challenge to Traditional Religion

The Internet can, for several reasons, be an interesting case for such a study. This global network of computers gives us unprecedented possibilities to interact, independent of the limitations of time and space. The amount and diversity of information made available though the Internet, and the anonymity of communication through text and digital images, challenge not only geographic boundaries but also the conventions and norms for meaning making and social interaction formed through local tradition. Much of the first wave of scholarly literature on this subject focused on the possibilities opened up by the Internet to *transform* such conventions. In the case of religion, the Internet (or "cyberspace") was depicted as the epitome of the "spiritual marketplace" (Roof 1999). Instant access to all known and yet unknown forms of religion would severely challenge religious authorities and forms of worship based on tradition; and computer-based interaction would break down stereotypes and divisions based on the "traditional" religious conventions and norms used in face-to-face interaction (Zaleski 1997; O'Leary and Brasher 1996). Thus, new forms of religion would emerge, together with increased tolerance and dialogue between people of different faiths (Brasher 2001).

Much of this optimistic, early research was based on surveys and observations of Web sites, offering broad reflections on the overall phenomena of religion online (Campbell 2003; Dawson and Cowan 2004). Few studies provided more detailed analyses based on long-term observation of online interaction in religious discussion groups, news groups, or chat rooms. Later studies have suggested that online interaction can provide new opportunities to strengthen and develop religious beliefs, as well as supplying new forms of community, not least for those (like religious minority groups) for whom this possibility is limited in the local context (Campbell 2001; Fernback 2002; O'Leary [1996] 2004; Berger and Ezzy 2004).

While these studies have tended to focus on users within a certain religious tradition, and who interact in relatively separated online contexts (such as e-mail lists or specific news groups), the study that is to be discussed here focuses on discussions of religion in a different setting. During the year 2000 I followed discussion on religion on a popular Swedish Web community for youth. Here, thousands of young people from different backgrounds logged on

daily. During the time of the study, the Web community I will refer to as "the Site" had more than half a million members.[6] Anyone could register as a member of the Site through submitting a nickname and an e-mail address. Data such as gender and age were optional. Members had access to a personal Web site, a system of instant messages, and groups to discuss subjects ranging from lollipops to Jesus. Any member could form a discussion group at the Site, and rules and norms for interaction where basically up to the users to decide.[7]

This diversity of users and opinions, and the absence of explicit control by authorities such as religious institutions, teachers, or parents, made the Site an interesting place to study young people's negotiations of the meaning of religion. How would the lack of overt authority impact their "talk" about beliefs and practices? Would the diversity of users mean new opportunities to enter into dialogue with peers of different faiths and to rethink the kind of opinions on "traditional religion" described in previous studies (cf. von Brömssen 2003)? How would the anonymity provided by text-based discussions impact the possibility to question the meaning of these conventions, in comparison with experiences in life off-line?

The study consisted of observations of interaction on the Site, a close analysis of the interchange of messages in eight groups focusing on either Christianity or new religious phenomena such as modern witchcraft, magic, and Satanism. In addition, I interviewed fifteen male and female users between eighteen and twenty years of age about their experiences of the Site. These interviews were conducted in the local contexts of the informants.[8]

Negotiating Religious Tradition Online—in Practice

When the informants described previous experiences of discussing religion with peers, they often referred to the kinds of ideas about traditional religion (often equated with the "Church") as have been found in previous studies. All of them, in turn, expected to find different perspectives on religion on the Internet. However, my analysis of the discussion groups showed that typical conventions for describing traditional religion were salient on the Site, as well. As seen in this posting, Christianity was frequently described as the opposite of freethinking:

> Boosh:[9]
> The bible is a book about wars . . . if you take away all bible references to conflicts, then your bible will become pretty thin. Drop the churches, synagogues and mosques . . . let people think for themselves . . . FREE-THINKING . . . hehe . . . the enlightenment yes then people started thinking for themselves and not the churches for

them . . . then they'll understood that why, this is wrong there is no god . . . you got to think for yourselves . . . think my little children . . . I know its hard . . . but try anyway.

Although the groups on Christianity were presented as forums for Christians to share their faith among themselves and with "seekers," the groups often came to be dominated by fierce debates between "believers" and "nonbelievers." The polarization between these groups was clearly based on shared understandings of Christianity shaped by conventions about traditional religion. The "believers" defended the validity of the Bible, an almighty God, and Christian norms in the life of modern individuals, whereas "nonbelievers" criticized the authority of these beliefs and ascribed to the "believers" attributes such as stupidity, rigidity, and lack of independence. The "nonbelievers" either disassociated themselves from all forms of religion, basing their arguments on reason and scientific facts, or advocated a more individualized religion, based on religious freedom and individual experience. These participants often identified with religious traditions that have come to represent alternatives and opposition to Christianity, such as neo-paganism and Satanism.

The polarization between these groups continued throughout the period of study, even though there were occasional attempts to challenge the stereotype of "believers" that prevailed. As exemplified in the following excerpt from one of the groups, Christians sometimes tried to expand or nuance the conventions about "traditional" authorities, beliefs, and norms:

Emmi:
Haha, I think I prefer hell before heaven. I rather keep my freedom instead of following god's, if I may say—pathetic, rules. I spit in the beard of god.

Maria:
sigh my young friend, I almust said . . . what do you know about christianity? Hardly enough to be able to accuse christianity for deprivation of liberty! Few people feel as free and happy as christians (I presume after having read numerous biographies of prev criminals and would-be suicides that have been saved to what they themselves describe as freedom) "pathetic rules." Yes, rules are horrible, aren't they? The whole society is darn full of them! You are not allowed to . . .

Maria: continue . . .
. . . kill, not drink and drive, not rape, not steal, not abuse people, not falsify . . . pathetic, isn't it? No, but joking apart, the rules of christianity are special. God has given us them as suggestions of how to live,

> advices for life simply, since he wants what's best for us. It's up to us whether we want to follow them or not! This is where our free will enters . . . you can choose to believe or be an atheist. If you've become a christian you can go on being it or . . .
>
> *Maria: 3 (-hang in there-)*
> . . . withdraw. You can choose to follow the rules or totally ignore them, God forces nobody, the choice is up to every person . . . I myself follow them because I believe that God wants what's best for me, but I resepct you if you have chosen to do something else! Ok?
>
> *Cabined: Maria*
> "The choice is up to every person" . . . (?!) . . . my oh my . . . .you God does not receive those who haven't received him . . . that is you are free to choose . . . but if you don't chose god you may not end up in hell nowadays in "modern christianity" . . . but you WON'T go to your heaven . . . don't claim anything else . . . then you don't know your bible . . . and you called yourself a christian, didn't you??? And if you call yourself a christian then you have to follow you bible FULLY and not choose certain parts . . . continue
>
> *Cabined: Maria 2*
> . . . this is nothing more than basic science of religion . . . if you believe in the bible or are a fundamentalist . . . then you can NOT drop certain elements in your sacred text . . . then you sort of commit a sin according to your own belief . . .

In this exchange, Maria's attempt to challenge the convention of "traditional religion" as incongruent with "individual choice" is responded to by a reinforcement of the same convention. A similar strategy was also used by other Christians, as in this excerpt from a later discussion:

> *Maria: sent by Sven*
> . . . I guess that you didn't pay attention when you wrote your contribution, at least I hope so! It actually says in the Bible that all of us christians shall go into the world and make ALL people disciples. That's like our mission! What I want to say is, to all who don't believe in god: We don't want to force you or press lots of stuff onto you, but we wont you to know so much that you your selves choose to follow jesus. 'Cause that's the unly way to come to Jesus, you have to . . .
>
> *Sven: continue . . .*
> . . . choose by your self. There is no other way. You wont get to heaven for having a christian dad. You don't get to heaven by living in a certain "way". You just get to heaven in one way, by asking forgivness from the living god, Jesus. If you do that he shall also forgive you.

> Then you will also live forever. And you should try to follow the commandments of the bible and also try to carry out the missions there!! I don't want to be to fuzzy, 'cause this is not fuzziness there is one way: HEAVEN or HELL there's no place to be neutral!!! Choose the right side, even if it's more narrow and harder to walk!

Also in this posting, conventions based on traditional Christian dogmas about the authority of God and the Bible are used to restore "fuzzy" boundaries between the "nonbelievers' " and the "believers' " understandings of the individual's right to choose in religious matters. The more Christian informants, like Maria, attempted to resist conventions about "traditional religion," the more they became caught in discussions that rather reinforced such conventions.

Discussions in the groups focusing on magic, witchcraft, and Satanism were somewhat less defined by point-counterpoint assumptions about what characterizes religion. Much of the interactions consisted of a constant inflow of questions and suggestions about how to become a witch or magician. But on the other hand, discussions also turned to questions about which practices and authorities were more valid than others:

> *Jodi:*
> Hi I would like to learn magic. I believe in most of the stuff in that area. I can tell fortunes by pendulum, dices, runes and interpret dreams that come through but I'd like to learn magic. IF you would like to teach me send a mess. Thanks.
>
> *Bastard:*
> Blaaaa all of you who want to be taught: dthere's things like libraries or books noone can teach you magic. It's so damned indefinite and noone can know magic, that's a thing you feel. Get out in the woods and get to know it instead see the beauty of all things. Stop all damned blaaah I'm tired as hell now so I might seem whining and dainty
>
> *Chrone:*
> I don't agree at all. Magic can very well be "taught." In many systems it is seen as downright dangerous to practice without a teacher. I agree that you need to learn to "feel," but if you cant discuss those feelings with someone there's not going to be any development. Splendid isolation is not always strength (. . .) Individualism is important in itself, but it is through interaction with other people that our consciousness grows.

Compared with the Christian groups, this diversity of standpoints about religious beliefs and practices seemed to present better opportunities for an open and egalitarian dialogue between participants representing different ways of being religious. However, even in these groups conventions about traditional

religion affect the discussions. First of all, conventions about the intolerance and hierarchy of Christianity were used to distinguish and assert the beliefs and values of alternative religious traditions by contrast:

> *fire:*
> . . . surely the more serious among us have no problem with the christian image of god . . . since pantheism and polytheism are two fundaments of wicca . . . what bothers me is that many christians seem to have a problem with our image of the higher powers . . .

Furthermore, conventions of "traditional religion," with its presumed adherence to religious authorities, became a negative benchmark for defining more or less authentic ways of using these new religious traditions. Experience and individual choice emerged as such contrasting authentic criteria.

However, in discussions between younger users, often referred to as "wannabes," and those who presented themselves as more "experienced practitioners," these alternative criteria also became means for creating hierarchies and expressing conflicts. "Wannabes" were accused of lack of experience, and associated with popular versions of these new religious traditions.

> *West-girl: Flora . . .*
> Just a quiet thought Flora, what do you think is the greatest difference between yourself and the "VeckoRevyn[10]-witches"? I'm not asking this as an insult but am interested in your way of thinking.
>
> *Flora: West-girl*
> The greatest difference is that I do not label myself. I'm neither witch, magician or whatever they use to call themselves. I am me, and I am interested in magic: studying and practicing. Furthermore I have studied some different forms of mysticism for years, I don't claim to know everything (a bit like Socrates perhaps ;) and do not belong to the group who WANT TO move objects by the power of the mind or "throw curses" at people. In short I may have reached some personal maturity with regard to my interest. :)

In the midst of defining what constitutes authentic practice, these young people were also negotiating the nature of religious authority.

As participants moved from wide-open religious exploration toward more serious commitment to a set of religious practices, this sort of banter was less satisfying. Lugh and Aurora were among those young people who became members of the Site in order to find a context where they could share experiences and ideas with like-minded people and eventually develop a more profound or "serious" identity as a Wiccan or Satanist. They reacted strongly toward attempts to take on authority and scold the younger

"wannabes." Still, according to Lugh, both of them eventually felt that the diversity of individual versions of the traditions expressed on the Site made discussions too fragmented and disrupted. They wanted more "profound" exchanges, and finally they both left the Site for a more specialized and moderated online forum.

This ambivalence about the value of explicit leadership and shared focus on core beliefs echoes conventions about traditional religion. Familiar dilemmas remain, even in young people's use of alternative religious traditions to form "religion in my own way." While such elements might be attractive for an individual faith to grow more "serious" and stable, they are often avoided because of their association with "traditional religion."

The Ambiguity of Online Interaction

My analysis of interaction on the Site brought out certain features that seem to explain why online communication came to reinforce rather than destabilize conventions about and divisions between traditional religion and "religion in my own way." First of all, the form for communication played a part. In these discussion groups, postings were limited to a maximum of 500 signs. Several of the informants described how this pushed them to be more brief and frank than in spoken words. Some of them liked this, but they all recognized how it inhibited nuances and increased the risk of mistakes and misunderstandings. The lack of additional, complicating cues to a person's identity, like seeing Christians with tattoos or playing in secular rock bands, seemed to contribute to the use of stereotypes about people of other faiths.[11]

This seemed to be exacerbated by the transitory character of the groups. The constant entry of new members with various interests and intentions interrupted discussions and made them fragmentary or repetitive, as the same issues and debates returned over and over again. Thus, communication through brief text-based messages did not seem to leave enough time and space for information that could make participants reconsider their understanding of each other's identities and intentions. Nor did it encourage encounters where more profound exchanges could take place.

Second, the lack of overt religious authorities and norms for interaction by moderation seemed to lead to a struggle for control over the group's discourse. In this struggle, new structures of authority developed in which certain users came to dominate. These "insiders" were frequently present and were skilled in text-based discussions. They also used certain strategies to control the discussion, including formulation (the interpretation of another person's statement in a way that takes control of its meaning), critical comments, and irony (cf. Fairclough 1992, 234–36). Because most of them were "nonbelievers,"

these strategies seemed to suit their critical and distanced attitude to religion, but—as shown in the following excerpt—made it difficult for other people to challenge them or introduce a different agenda:

> *God's Love:*
> I'm tired of people making fun of me, I'm going to drop this discussion with you guys now, we are not getting anywhere anyway, everybody just gets irritated (including me). (. . .)
>
> *Stirner: God's Love*
> So when you cannot answer our arguments, you don't want to stick around anymore?
>
> *God's Love: Stirner*
> Ok, I will, against my principles =), make a contribution against your weird attack! I haven't said that I quit because I can't answer your arguments! If you check out my earlier contributions, I say that's all I have been doing: answering arguments. And what do I gain by that? Let's just face it, you hate christians, will always do it, and I'm not going to hang around being some damned sounding board for your bullshit!

Conditions for interaction on the Internet can result in polarizations rather than dialogue between individuals with different understandings of religion. The potentially "open" space of the Internet, where conventions and cues that structure face-to-face situations of interaction become ambiguous, also introduces new forms of authority, along with elements of insecurity and risk.[12] As Maria's experience shows, the risk of becoming misunderstood, criticized, or scolded was considerable. In this situation, the safety of conventions based on experience in other contexts can become preferable to experiments with new meanings. Stirner's reflections, as one of the "insiders," also show that the persistence of these conventions supported the interests and position of the dominant users: ". . . we hope that the discussions will start again . . . and that's why we don't try to break every Christian that enters the groups, or every stupid atheist. 'Cause if they start discussing with each other perhaps interesting things will be happening."

Indications of Reconstructed Conventions

The main tendencies in these Internet exchanges, then, were toward the ironic reinforcement of conventional definitions of what constitutes religion. Still, there were also examples of how interaction at the Site made the informants reconsider the meaning of conventions of traditional religion for their own and other people's identity. Such reflections were, however, primarily expressed by

informants who found ways to overcome the challenges and risks of discussing religion on the Site. One of the crucial points seemed to be whether the conditions of a particular site gave users a sense of trust and control, rather than enhanced insecurity.[13] Certain resources seemed crucial to developing this trust and sense of control. The first concerned the means to be a frequent presence in the groups. Informants who had regular access to a computer of their own and a high-speed connection to the Internet were more likely to have this experience. In the world of Internet communication, the ability to get one's words on the screen is the most basic component of power. Secondly, informants who were well skilled in expressing themselves through written text were better able to avoid misunderstandings and stereotyping.

In addition to these matters of skill and resources, it seems that the most powerful members of the Site were also most able to risk change. Stirner was a convinced atheist, but the fact that his views on religion were supported by those who dominated the discussion groups gave him a secure position at the Site. For him, interactions online eventually led to a revised opinion of Christians and friendship with one of his former opponents:

> . . . I've also gained more respect for . . . the more secular part of Christianity. Svirk and people like him. For people who have reflected on this and, well, for some reason accept god's existence . . . // . . . but that accept other people's opinion about this and do not try to adjust reality in order to fit the bible. I respect these people so much more, and so I don't look upon Christians as a homogeneous group in the same way as before.

In addition to power, resources, and skills, outcomes were also dependent on an individual's attitude about the religious tradition of his or her choice. Those who, like Maria and Lugh, based their faith on a specific tradition, found it more difficult to adopt the strategies that were common among the dominant users. For them, the tough, ironic, and distanced attitude of the "insiders" was not congruent with core values of Christianity or Wicca, respectively. Their religious commitment to values such as kindness toward enemies or tolerance for different views was ill suited to interaction on the Site. Maria and Mona both aspired, for instance, to create more dialogue between people of different faiths:

> *Mia*: How do you look upon your own position in these groups that you're a member of?
>
> *Maria*: I . . . that would be, trying to create not a sense of community but somehow . . . a bit more understanding between atheists and Christians.

But Maria's explicit Christian identity meant that she faced resistance when trying to act in this way. Mona, on the other hand, who refrained from associating

herself with a specific tradition but rather looked for commonalities between different religions, was able to act as a moderator and promote tolerance between different opinions in the groups:

> *Mona:*
> . . . To discuss religion is not unnecessary at all, sure we will never be able to convert each other, but isn't really what we want either, is it? On the contrary we learn to understand each other and to accept each others beliefs, which according to me is the best we can do. Because that is how you avoid war, not by abolishing things.

These examples show that when discussing possible reconstructions of religious conventions on the Internet, we need to take into consideration how different individuals are equipped with different resources that impact their ability to handle its risks and promises (cf. Slevin 2000, 115). The need for access and verbal skills shows how online interaction is connected to economic resources and competences earned in the individual's life off-line. And the differences between Mona, Stirner, and Maria underline how conventions defining religion in a society play a part, as well. Religious identities that correspond to conventions of "traditional religion" and "my own religion" in life outside the Internet may face less resistance than identities that blur those lines. Ironically, in this way the use of tradition may allow individuals to make use of online interaction for creative reflection.

Conclusion

The Internet has been described as the "epitome" of transformations of traditional religion in late modern society. The analysis in this chapter of how young people negotiate the meaning of religion on the Internet shows that the conditions for these kinds of transformations are more ambivalent than anticipated in early studies. Discussions on the Internet might be "disembedded" from the tangible forms of institutions and authorities that uphold conventions about religion in a certain country. However, the ambiguity that follows the absence of such traditional structures does not automatically make these conventions and norms obsolete. The discussion in this chapter makes clear that "virtual" interactions on the Internet cannot be neatly separated from many of the conditions of daily life outside the Internet. Those conditions determine who has the access and skill to participate, and those factors help to set the terms of the dialogue. The cultural conditions of daily life also supply participants with conventions about religion. Constructions of religion online, then, are the outcome of a complex interplay between the conditions for interaction in a particular site, individual resources, and the nature of different religious traditions

or "narratives" in a society. Thus, the construction of religion, even in the transient sites of late modern society, not only is a question of individual choice in a "spiritual marketplace" but also is negotiated in social interaction that is structured by religious authorities and conventions, no matter how institutionally weak. This study of young people negotiating religion in cyberspace can, hopefully, contribute to a further understanding of how religious tradition is constructed and reconstructed in other contexts of late modern society.

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter I will use the concept "late modernity"in referring to the decades following the Second World War, in accordance with the understanding of these as a radicalization of tendencies of modernity (rather than a shift into a postmodern condition) advocated by, for example, Giddens (1991) and Fornäs (1992, 18).

2. This study was the first to cover not only Christian churches and denominations but also immigrant religions and new religious movements.

3. An additional 7 percent took part in religion mediated through TV and radio.

4. The Lutheran Church of Sweden was the national state church from the sixteenth century until the year 2000. The other official Swedish denominations originate from the middle of the nineteenth century.

5. See also Knut Lundby's (1997) discussion of "sacred" as constructed in the interplay between substantial and functional elements.

6. The population of Sweden was at the time approaching 9 million people.

7. During the time of the study the webmasters of the Site did not, except in grave cases of racial discrimination or commercial activities, try to moderate or control these groups.

8. For a more thorough account of the study, see Lövheim 2004b. The results of the study have also been discussed in Lövheim 2004a.

9. The names in these excerpts are changed to ensure the confidentiality of the informants. Spelling and stylistic mistakes are in the original comments from the groups.

10. *Vecko-Revyn* is a popular Swedish magazine for teenage girls.

11. Compare Burkhalter (1999) and Kendall (1999) for a discussion of similar patterns developing in UseNet discussions on race or gender.

12. Compare Clark (2003) for a discussion of how diversity of meaning and ambivalence of traditional boundaries and conventions in the media can result in processes of reestablishing these among young people.

13. See also Linderman and Lövheim (2003).

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PART II

Religion “Out of Place”

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6

Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Transnationalization of Religious Life

Peggy Levitt

Spring quietly announced its arrival on that early New York morning in March. New buds softened the stark winter branches. Business owners swept the sidewalks and arranged their fruits and vegetables as I walked along street after nearly-empty street. Fathers sleepwalked through their Saturday morning ritual of taking the baby out to the local coffee shop so their wives could get more rest. Early spring in New York, comfortingly predictable.

But New York is never just about the familiar but about surprise as well. I was on my way to a memorial service for the Reverend Pandurangshastri Athavale, or, as his followers called him, Dadaji, the leader of the Swadhyaya movement in India, who died in November 2003. The leaders of the Swadhyaya Parivar or "Swadhyaya family" in Lowell, Massachusetts, who I befriended while working on this project, had invited me to attend the ceremony. As I made my way over to the Jacob Javits Convention Center, I noticed the many little preparations under way that I would have missed had I not had "tickets." Cars crammed full with large extended families hurried to find spaces in the neighborhood parking lots. Dozens of yellow school buses transported Swadhyayees from all over the region to the convention center doors. And groups of followers, wearing name tags written in Gujarati pinned to the lapels of their winter coats, were being shepherded over to the gathering from Penn Station. While New York woke up and grew busy with shoppers, tourists, and antiwar protesters, the curtain was rising on an important yet barely noticed sideshow.

It was a wonderful, enlightening performance. By the end of the day, more than 10,000 mourners from all over the East Coast would pay their respects. A representative from the New York City mayor's office, who attended a special commemorative ceremony in the afternoon, declared March 20 Dadaji's day on the city's calendar. All through the month of March, Didiji, his successor, presided over similar events in Chicago, Toronto, Los Angeles, and other North American cities where there are also large Swadhyaya communities.

Similar gatherings, also below the radar screen of most Americans, happen regularly around the country. When Americans tune into these events, they often do so against the backdrop of September 11. Through that lens, foreign-born Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and even Evangelical Protestants and their native-born offspring are often seen as a threat by those who fear religion's expanding role in American society and its increasingly diverse character.

A careful look at how migrants[1] are changing America's religious landscape reveals a much more complex story about the United States and the world at large. The fact that Swadhyaya leaders had the strength and power to organize an event at New York's main convention center attended by local politicians attests to how well this community is integrating itself into the United States. At the same time, by participating in Swadhyaya, its members remain strongly attached to India. They also form part of a global religious community, with chapters in the United Kingdom, Fiji, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, and anyplace else that Indian emigrants live. Through religion, Swadhyayees belong to several countries and to a global religious community at the same time.

Groups like Swadhyaya call into question fundamental assumptions about nations, immigration, and religion. In the twenty-first century, many people will belong to several societies and cultures at once, and they will use religion to do so. Being part of the United States and maintaining ties to other countries and other communities around the globe are not incompatible.[2] Instead, figuring out how to do this, making seemingly contradictory loyalties and cultural expectations fit, and using religion to do so, is the daily task of increasing numbers.

Thinking Outside the Nation-State Container

Maintaining multiple identities and living lives that cross national boundaries is hard to grasp. Most people take for granted that the world has always been and always will be organized into sovereign nation-states. Most governments see the causes and solutions to their socioeconomic woes as located inside their borders rather than acknowledging they are produced by people who live cross-border lives. But such a view is short on history. Market capitalism, imperial and colonial regimes, the antislavery and workers' rights campaigns, illegal pirating networks, and religions have always crossed borders.

Assuming that social life automatically takes place within a nation-state container blinds us to the way the world actually works. Capturing these dynamics requires trading in a national lens for a transnational one. This optic jettisons the assumption that the nation-state is the natural, logical container where social life takes place and begins instead with a world with no set borders and boundaries. It asks why particular kinds of boundaries arise in particular historical contexts and assumes that these processes happen simultaneously in several settings and at several levels of social experience. It does not deny the continuing importance of nation-states or the fact that states continue to regulate many aspects of life. Nor does it argue that everything is produced by factors operating outside national borders. Indeed, in many cases, such forces play only a small supporting role in the story.

Understanding contemporary social experience requires taking into consideration the kinds of cross-border factors that may be at play. That means asking how individuals and groups actually organize themselves, and differentiate themselves from others, without assuming, a priori, that they are organized into nation-states. Understanding religion and migration demands going beyond comparing one country to another. Instead, it requires mapping, without preconceived notions, the networks of individuals and institutions that emerge and how they operate.

Using a Transnational Lens to Understand the Migrant Experience

What is gained by using a transnational lens to understand the migration experience? Two "bookends" bracket twentieth-century U.S. immigration. Nearly 1 million immigrants arrived annually during its first decade, as well as during the last (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [USDHS] 2004). These "new" immigrants come from different parts of the world than those who preceded them. In the early 1900s, the top five sending countries were Italy, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Austria, and the United Kingdom; a hundred years later, they were Mexico, the Philippines, China, India, and the Dominican Republic (USDHS 2004).

These trends dramatically are altering U.S. demography. Whereas in 1900 most of the foreign-born came from Europe—more than 8 out of 9 million (USDHS 2004)—in 2003, nearly 54 percent of the 33.5 million foreign-born were from Latin America.[3] In 1900, just over 120,000 foreign-born residents were from Asia (Gibson and Lennon 2001). In 2002, there were 13.1 million Asian-born people in the country,[4] representing a more than eightfold increase in less than forty years (Lott 2004).

New immigrants are moving to places where newcomers have not traditionally settled. In 1910, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston were the destinations of choice. Eleven out of the twelve most popular places to settle

were located in the Northeast or Midwest, whereas today they are in the Sunbelt or the West.[5]

Although most migrants still move to large urban centers, there has also been a dramatic shift toward settlement in smaller cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Other migrants move farther off the beaten path. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of foreign-born in the South and Midwest grew by 88 and 65 percent, respectively. Much of this growth took place in small-town locales that have not traditionally seen large immigrant populations. Whether they are packing poultry in the Carolinas or raising cattle in rural Nebraska, migrants are diversifying areas that previously knew little heterogeneity.[6]

At the same time, many immigrants retain strong, enduring ties to their countries of origin and to other places where their fellow emigrants have settled.[7] They still invest, express their political interests, and seek spiritual guidance in their countries of origin while they put down strong roots in the United States. Those who engage in regular economic and political activities are fairly few in number. Recent work by sociologist Alejandro Portes and his colleagues (2002, Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003) revealed that routine involvement in economic and political transnational activities characterized only 5 to 10 percent of the Dominican, Salvadoran, and Columbian migrants they surveyed. But many more were "periodic" transnational activists who took part in home-country affairs when there were elections, economic downturns, or natural disasters or during important life-cycle events.

Using a transnational optic to understand migration reveals several important things. For one, sometimes migration is as much about the people who stay behind as it is about those who move. In some cases, the ties between migrants and nonmigrants are so strong and widespread that migration radically transforms the lives of individuals who remain at home. Actual movement is not required to participate across borders. People, money, and social remittances—the ideas and practices that migrants send back into their communities of origin—permeate the daily lives of those who remain behind, altering their behavior and transforming notions about equity, gender relations, morality, and what states should and should not do. The religious and political groups they belong to also begin to operate across borders. What happens to those in the United States cannot be separated from what happens to those who remain in the homeland because their fates are inextricably linked. When a small group is regularly involved in their sending country, and others participate periodically, their combined efforts add up. Taken together and over time, these activities constitute a social force with tremendous transformative significance that can modify the economy, values, and everyday lives of entire regions.

Looking at migrants and nonmigrants in a transnational context also reveals the many layers and sites that make up the social fields that they occupy. The relationship between Salvadoran villagers and their migrant family members in an urban neighborhood in Los Angeles is not just a product of these

narrow, local connections. It is also strongly influenced by ties between the Salvadoran and the U.S. states and between the U.S. and Salvadoran national Catholic churches. Ties to Salvadorans living in Europe and Mexico also affect these dynamics. Similarly, a complete account of the religious lives of Brazilian immigrants in Massachusetts must go beyond the connections between specific congregations in Boston and Brazil and locate these ties within the thick, multilayered web of links between national denominations in the United States and Brazil. Transnational social fields, then, encompass the many sites of migrant and nonmigrant connection. They also include the many levels of cross-border ties that emerge in response.[8]

Finally, seeing migrants and nonmigrants as occupying the same social space also drives home that becoming incorporated into the United States and sustaining strong ties to one's homeland are not at odds with each other. Rather, the migrant experience is more like a gauge that, although anchored, pivots back and forth between sending and receiving country, with different orientations at different stages of life. Migrants do not trade one membership for another. Instead, they change where they devote their energy and resources in response to elections, wars, economic decline, life-cycle events, and natural disasters. By doing so, they contradict the expectation that newcomers will either fully assimilate or remain entirely transnational and that, instead, they will craft some combination of the two (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Morawska 2003).

A transnational gaze is both a perspective and a variable. It assumes that "here" and "there" are strongly linked. The analyst must then empirically study the actual ties that emerge between the home and host country and what their impacts are. In many cases, home-country influences are of little importance, whereas in others, excluding them from the story renders it dangerously incomplete.

Redrawing the Religious Map

Using a transnational optic also brings the lived religious experience into sharper, more accurate focus. Without acknowledging the transnational character of social experience, we fail to recognize many of the ways in which religious experience actually works. Religion is one of the principal ways that migrants stay connected to places beyond where they settle. By doing so, they transform religion and culture in the United States and around the world. American religious pluralism and the globalization of religious life have become part and parcel of the same dynamic.

Some migrants introduce new faith traditions to the United States. Others expand what had been relatively small religious communities. Still others belong to traditions with long histories in the United States, thus necessitating a negotiation

between the old and the new. In each case, these processes are often connected to and influenced by the activities of coreligionists around the world. [9]

This is an age-old story for Catholics, who have had lots of practice incorporating newcomers, and who use many of the same strategies today with Brazilians and Vietnamese that successfully transformed earlier Irish and Italian immigrants into American Catholics. But many mainline and evangelical Protestant faiths are also experiencing an influx of immigrants at a time when their native-born membership is declining (Machacek 2003; Warner 2005). These flows grow out of missionary work done in Latin America and Asia during the 1900s. The descendents of those who converted are now bringing their own version of Christianity back to the United States and asking to practice their faith alongside their denominational brothers and sisters. New and old members have to invent ways to pray, learn, and pursue social change together. Their views about how to do so are often quite different, and there are no obvious referees to resolve the disputes. The compromises they ultimately agree on are a major catalyst for religious change.

Other immigrants belong to global religious movements that unite members who happen to be living in the United States with fellow believers around the world. Charismatic Catholics, for example, belong to small communities of prayer and fellowship created to give members a more meaningful faith experience. Immigrants and travelers are encouraged to participate in worship groups wherever they are, which is easy to do, since many groups observe the same rituals. Because the visitor encounters the familiar, she feels at home wherever she worships. The Tablighi Jama'at is one of the largest transnational Islamic movements, which originated in northern India and is now believed to be comparable in scale and scope to Christian Pentecostalism. Its members participate in missions that travel around the world urging Muslims to wake up, be faithful, and return to the correct practice of Islam (Bowen 2004; Gaborieau 1999). Diverse Sufi orders have been maintaining ties between new places of residence and their centers since the tenth century (Bowen 2004; Eickelman and Piscatori 1990).

The globalization of the sacred, then, occurs on many fronts. Migration-driven changes run parallel to connections arising between members of global religious communities and social movements that are not related to migration. In one scenario, migrants use religious institutions to maintain ties to their homelands. In a second, individuals form part of religious multiethnic organizations and movements that connect them to coreligionists locally and globally. Their primary identification is not to the nation but to the global religious community. Both types of global religious connection create and are created by the other (Bowen 2004; Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins 2002; Levitt 2004).

Not just the cast of religious characters changes through migration, but notions about what religion actually is and where to find it change as well. The separation of church and state is so firmly embedded in the American psyche that

most Americans treat religion and culture as more distinct than they actually are. Many new immigrants come from places where religion and culture go hand in hand. They cannot sort out Irishness from Catholicism, Indianness from being Hindu, or what it means to be Pakistani from what it means to be a Muslim. Faith guides the way they live their everyday lives, with whom they associate, and the kinds of communities they belong to, even among those who say they are not very religious. Their ideas about tolerance and diversity are shaped by experiences where states actively regulate religious life and where expectations about relations between "us" and "them" are quite different from those in the United States.

As a result, many immigrants bring a much broader understanding of what religion is and where to find it to the table. The sacred and the spiritual spill over into the workplace, the schoolyard, and the neighborhood. When people adorn their refrigerator doors with "saint magnets," hang cross-stitched samplers with religious teachings on their walls, light candles in honor of the Vírgen, or decorate their rearview mirrors and dashboards with photos of their gurujis, they imbue the quotidian with the sacred. When a Latino family celebrates its daughter's fifteenth birthday or a Hindu son invites his elderly father to live with him in the United States, they are performing religious as well as cultural acts (Ammerman 1997; Hall 1997; Orsi 1999). For some newcomers, then, American values are, in part, religious values. And these values are made not just in the U.S.A. but in Latin America, South Asia, and Africa as well.

Migrants also bring different understandings of the meaning of membership in a religious group. In some cases, membership entails worshiping in a particular congregation, where the theology, leadership, and fee structure are clearly established. But many migrants do not feel a sense of belonging to any one congregation. They are comfortable worshiping at whatever church, temple, or mosque is close by. Their faith does not depend on their ongoing participation with the same members of their faith community.

Furthermore, religion does not stay inside the walls of official religious buildings. Private, informal religious rituals often reveal much more about the changing nature of religious life than what goes on at the church or at the temple (Diaz-Stevens 1994). When a Muslim silently says her prayers while stopped at a traffic light because there is no place nearby to pray, she is transforming Islam in America. When a traveler crosses himself before the plane takes off, he is expressing his faith whether or not he ever attends Mass on Sunday.

Just as the walls of religious buildings are permeable, so are the boundaries between faith traditions (McGuire 2003; Tweed 2002; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003). Many migrants come from countries where religious life has always combined elements from several faiths. Much of Latino Catholicism, for example, integrates indigenous, African, and Christian practices, implicitly giving followers permission to be many things at one time. Many of the Brazilian and Indian immigrants I met saw no problem with belonging to several religious communities simultaneously because all the pieces fit under the broad umbrella

of Christianity or Hinduism. For these individuals, boundary crossing or combining elements from different faiths is the rule, not the exception. The American context, with its uniquely open and individualistic religious marketplace, also encourages such religious shifts. Increasingly, Americans switch denominations to find the brand that brings them the most spiritual satisfaction (Finke and Stark 1992; Roof 1999; Wolfe 2003; Wuthnow 1989).

Similarly, religion does not obey political or ethnic boundaries. The Crusaders resurrected Christianity in the range of dominions, kingdoms, and principalities that had been claimed by Muslims. Similarly, Incan, Mayan, and Aztec traditions were forcibly absorbed into Hispanic Catholicism. The British spread Anglicanism to the four corners of their empire. Even the birth of the modern nation-state system has not required God to use a passport. There are 1 billion Catholics around the globe—only slightly less than the population of China. India's 966 million population is only slightly bigger than the worldwide population of 900 million Sunni Muslims ("Religious Bodies" 2003). The Catholic Church has the most highly articulated, widely recognized system of transnational governance, linking its members through its national conferences and social movement chapters around the world. But smaller denominational groups like the Baptist World Alliance and the International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization also have administrative structures with a global reach. These engender a sense of global religious membership that complements, competes with, or supersedes national membership.

These changes in religious demography are transforming the balance of power within global religious institutions. At the last decennial convening of the Anglican Communion, for example, third world bishops challenged the traditional authority of English and American prelates and their positions on homosexuality, abortion, and the ordination of women. The center of political gravity in Roman Catholicism, dominated until only recently by Italian prelates, is slowly shifting as more and more cardinals from Africa, Asia, and South America are appointed to positions of power.

Finally, religion endows followers with symbols, rituals, and narratives that allow them to imagine themselves in sacred landscapes, marked by holy sites, shrines, and places of worship (Richman 2005; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003). Some individuals imagine these spaces as easily coexisting with the actual physical and political geography. For others, the religious landscape takes precedence over its secular counterpart. What happens in Bombay, London, Johannesburg, Fiji, and Trinidad is what matters most to some Swadhyayees, who think of these sites as the boundaries of a sort of Swadhyaya "country." Minarets, crosses, and sanctuaries are the salient landmarks in these imaginary terrains rather than national monuments or historic structures. Religion also transcends the boundaries of time, by allowing followers to feel part of a chain of memory, connected to a past, a present, and a future (Hervieu-Léger 2000). That is why Cubans in Miami, writes religious studies scholar Thomas

Tweed (1999), bring their newborns to be baptized at the shrine that they built to their national patron saint. By doing so, they induct their children into an imagined Cuban nation with a past in Cuba, a present in Miami, and a future that they hope will take place once again in their homeland.

Religion, then, is the archetypal spatial and temporal boundary crosser. Many faiths tolerate and even encourage the idea of belonging to several groups at the same time. Their proclivity toward syncretism makes combining religious elements and crossing borders the norm rather than the exception (Beyer 1994, 2001; Casanova 1994; Robertson 1991).

Something Old and Something New

But, some will rightly argue, this is an old story. Economic production, politics, and social movements have always crossed borders. Immigration and religion in the United States have always been part of larger global processes. Religion has never been tied to the nation-state in the United States in the way that it has in countries with "official" state religions. In fact, this is the third wave of "religious accommodation" between immigrants and the native-born. The previous two, involving the incorporation of different kinds of Protestants, followed by the incorporation of Catholics and Jews, were each global in their own ways.

This third encounter, however, differs from its previous incarnations in several important ways. The first is the greater diversity of faiths and the nature of global religious communities. According to sociologist José Casanova, contemporary world religions have four common features. First, religious identity is voluntary rather than ascribed. Individuals choose the religious community they wish to belong to, and the individual is responsible for his or her own faith. Second, global religious communities are in large measure imagined communities (Anderson 1991). The media and technology enable people to think of themselves as part of a community of followers across the globe who they have never met. Members of the Muslim Umma or of the Scalabrini order of priests feel a sense of connection to one another. Furthermore, each world religion is characterized by a comparable set of internal divisions. Most Christian denominations, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism all have proselytizing, reformist, and puritanical arms. Finally, the West is no longer the reference point against which "the rest" define themselves. Rather, global religious institutions define themselves in relation to each other.

Second, new communication and transportation technologies allow people to participate in places other than those where they live in fundamentally different ways than before. It is true that the nineteenth century was also an age of rapidly advancing technology. Migrants had the benefit of steamship and transcontinental railway travel, international mail and news wire service, and publishing houses to stay connected across borders. The current age of jet plane

travel, instant messaging, and Internet highways, however, makes these connections cheaper, easier, and more intimate than ever before. Unlike earlier migrants, who had only photographs and letters to "make sense" of their family members' lives, today those who remain behind can actually see and hear what goes on in the Church and in the neighborhood around it (Van der Veer 2001).

Third, earlier and contemporary migration experiences differ because most eastern and southern European migrants in the nineteenth century left without a clear sense of belonging to a particular nation-state. They departed either from colonized territories, as in the case of the Irish or the Polish, or from states in the process of consolidation, such as Italy. They tended to feel a greater affinity toward their sending province or region than to the nation as a whole. Many only began to think of themselves as Italian or Polish after religious leaders called them that when they were in the United States (Glazer 1954).

Furthermore, immigrants in the early 1900s were under much more pressure to naturalize and become "good Americans" than they are today. And, in some ways, it was easier for them to do so. The U.S. economy afforded low-skilled, non–English speakers many more opportunities. Settlement house workers, educators, and progressive reformers devoted themselves to teaching immigrants English, the principles of citizenship, and allegiance to American institutions. The government endorsed "one-hundred percent Americanism" campaigns designed to suppress foreign cultural and political differences that might nurture anti-American sentiments. Most Americans wholeheartedly supported President Woodrow Wilson's infallible test for proper hyphenated Americans who might retain "ancient affections but whose hearts and thoughts must be centered nowhere but in the emotions and the purposes and the policies of the USA."

Churches played, and continue to play, an integral role in the incorporation process, but the way they do so has changed considerably. Consider the case of the first waves of Irish immigrants compared with their contemporary counterparts. The Irish arriving in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped create the U.S. Catholic Church. They worshiped at national parishes, established to help newcomers make the transition from their own sending-country worship style to a more "American" style of practice. Irish priests, who never intended to go home, accompanied them. Because families often migrated together or were reunited once they arrived in the United States, attending Mass and participating in parish life were natural springboards toward host-country incorporation (Dolan 1992).

Today's "new" Irish join well-established Catholic parishes that are purposefully transforming themselves into multiethnic institutions. The Irish are just one of many new Catholic constituencies that, in contrast to their predecessors, must now adapt to rather than create the religious landscape. In fact, by 2010, Latino parishioners are likely to be the majority group among all Catholics (Cadena 1995). This dramatic demographic transition, also evidenced

to a lesser degree in the changing face of Church leadership, has pushed the Church to be more tolerant of enduring national diversity. By appropriating national patron saints, such as Mexico's Virgen de Guadalupe and the Dominican Republic's Virgen de Altagracia as icons of global Catholicism, the Church makes an important statement about who its members are and its willingness to accept their different worship styles. The social climate in general is also more tolerant of ethnic diversity—indeed, for some people, remaining "ethnic" is part of being a true American.

The Transnationalization of Religious Experience

America will always be an overwhelmingly Christian country. Those who settle definitively in the United States will always outnumber migrants who live transnational lives. But changes in migration and religion, albeit at the margins, are on the rise and are important harbingers of the future. More and more migrants will live transnational lives, and they will use religion to do so.

This signals important changes for how religion is actually lived and organized in the United States and how it should be studied. For one thing, national religions are increasingly transnational. Which groups are represented at America's religious table, and what they bring to the conversation are, in part, a function of forces operating outside our borders. What people actually believe, the rituals and practices they engage in to express those beliefs, and the organizational settings in which they enact them, are all transnationally informed. Religious life in the United States and in the homeland are increasingly interconnected.

So, when upper-middle-class Pakistani women worship alongside men in the United States and tell their relatives about it, some of those in Karachi assert their right to continue praying at home, while others also want to attend communal prayers and worship with their male counterparts. Similarly, the custom of organizing large-scale, all-day prayer and study sessions among certain Gujarati Hindu communities has been exported to the United States and refashioned to fit with people's work schedules, the climate, and greater distances between where they live. Home- and host-country beliefs and practices mutually shape and reshape each other.

These activities take place within organizations that are themselves transnational. In some cases, religious organizations become like transnational corporations, with highly developed, hierarchical institutional architectures. In others, religious groups work more like informal networks, forming partnership with other groups around specific projects before linking up with another group on another initiative. In still others, individual religious practice is driven by religious social movements, such as the multitude of charismatic Christian groups, and connects members around the globe. Whatever the form,

this means people are embedded in institutions that cross borders and are therefore exposed to a constant dose of ideas, practices, and identities from various sites and sources.

Another way to think of this is that religion lends itself particularly well to expressions of transnational belonging. Religion works differently than ethnicity or nationality. Its message of transcendence, codification and ensuing portability, and socialization of subsequent generations, to name a few, makes religion a fertile arena for multiple memberships. If transnational belonging is the wave of the future, religion is likely to be its principal stage.

In either case, the boundaries of religious pluralism and the forces that create it are clearly expanding. Like lived religion, some of the forces shaping national religious pluralism are also transnational. Religious practice in the United States both nourishes and detracts from homeland religious diversity, just as sending-country religious life both narrows and expands the U.S. religious panorama. Thus, Brazilian immigrants to the United States both introduce and export back an ever-expanding repertoire of Protestant possibilities, and migrants from Gujarat State carry a range of Hindu approaches to their fellow immigrants (and the native-born) and import a transformed version of religious practice back to India.

Taking stock of these dynamics means looking for religion in different places than those where it is traditionally studied. It means seeing the religious in the cultural. It means going where people actually practice their faith and noticing its spontaneous, informal incarnations. It means studying religion at home, at a community meeting, or on a mountaintop or beach. It means tracing out the layers and sites of the transnational web of religious experience and recognizing that they are interconnected nodes of the same dynamic.

Some people worry when migrants are loyal to two nations. They liken dual membership to polygamy, saying that you cannot be married to two countries at the same time. That religion engenders multiple loyalties makes it extremely suspect. So many acts of terrorism and violence have been perpetrated in the name of God (Bromley and Melton 2002; Ellens 2004; Juergensmeyer 2000; Stern 2003). Al Qaeda as well as Hindu, Christian, and Jewish groups espouse versions of faith that leave little room for argument.

But this is religion at the margins, rather than religion of the masses. Rather than posing a threat, strong transnational religious interdependence represents an opportunity. Instead of precipitating a "clash of civilizations," transnational migrants build bridges across cultures. They carry ideas, introduce skills, and redistribute wealth. Like the Pakistani mosque-goers mentioned earlier, they are translators—teaching people in the United States about Islam and exporting a more liberal version of what it means to be Muslim back to Pakistan. Like the Gujaratis, they are negotiators—figuring out how they can reconcile the conflicting demands of Hindu and U.S. values by still meeting their aging parents' expectations about filial respect and taking their children to

soccer practice at the same time. Like the Brazilians who noted, "Your last name isn't going to get you a job in the U.S.," they are change catalysts who demand equal treatment for all at home. By doing so, they extend the boundaries of the collective good beyond our national borders to include those in their homelands.

What constitutes right and wrong, tolerance and fairness is transnationally, not nationally, determined. Fighting poverty, sickness, or pollution is not just an American project. In countries like India, Pakistan, Brazil, and Ireland, as well as the United States, most of the people are concerned about raising their families, helping their communities, and being able to live safely and securely in a place where the system works. These are dreams we all can agree on. Throwing the religious baby out with the bathwater is no longer an option.

NOTES

1. I use the word *migrant* purposefully throughout most of this chapter to capture the idea that these transnationally oriented individuals are both immigrants and emigrants at the same time.

2. For examples, see Glick Schiller (2005), Levitt (2002, 2003, 2004), and Morawska (2003).

3. Only 13.7 percent were from Europe (Larsen 2004).

4. This figure includes "race alone" or "in combination" ("in combination" indicates that the respondent checked off two or more races). There are 11.6 million Asians in the "race alone" category.

5. Nine out of 12 of the most popular destinations are located in the Sunbelt or the West, bringing migration patterns of the foreign-born and native-born more in sync with each other (Spain 1999).

6. The three states that experienced more than a 200 percent change in the foreign-born population from 1990 to 2000 were Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina; many midwestern states saw at least 100 percent change (all figures from Malone et al. 2003). Dalla and her colleagues (2005) discuss the "browning" of Midwest meatpacking communities, where Hispanic and Asian migrants have responded to recruiting efforts by meatpackers to fill labor-intensive and unpleasant positions in the industry.

7. For an introduction to transnational migration scholarship, see Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1992, 1994); Ebaugh and Chafetz (2002); Faist (2000); Glick Schiller (1999); Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001); Grasmuck and Pessar (1991); Itzigsohn (2000); Kyle (2001); Levitt (2001a, 2001b); Mahler (1998); Morawska (2003); Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999); Smith and Guarnizo (1998); Van der Veer (2001); and Vertovec (2003).

8. World-Polity theorists and neo-institutionalists argue that there is a universalistic or global level of cultural and organizational formation that creates and strongly influences states, business enterprises, groups, and individuals. More and more, actors define themselves and their interests in response to the global cultural and organizational structures in which they are embedded (Boli and Thomas 1999; Meyer 2003).

Some, however, see global cultural production as an encounter between the global and the local. Instead of conceptualizing the global as macro-level political and economic forces that stand in opposition to local cultural elements, they explore where and how the global and the local meet, and the ways in which power hierarchies, as well as relations of reciprocity and solidarity, shape these encounters (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hannerz 1992; Ong 1999).

9. Although the vast majority of new immigrants are Christian (80 percent), including large numbers of nondenominational evangelicals, there are also significant numbers entering the country who are Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. Jasso and her colleagues (2003) found that 17 percent of immigrants who were admitted to the United States in the summer of 1996 expressed a religious preference other than Christian, Jewish, or none at all, more than four times that of the overall U.S. population (4 percent). Barry Kosmin, leader of the ARIS project, points out that the increased diversity of sending countries has changed the religious makeup of Asian migrants. Between 1990 and 2001, the proportion of the Asian American population who are Christian has fallen from 63 percent to 43 percent, while the percentage of those professing Asian religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc) has risen from 15 percent to 28 percent (Kosmin 2001). See also polls by Gallup (Newport 2004), the Pew Research Center on the People and the Press (2004), and Barna Research Group (2004) that indicate anywhere between 5 and 11 percent of Americans belong to non-Christian faiths.

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7

When a Funeral Isn't Just a Funeral: The Layered Meaning of Everyday Action

Ziad Munson

When is an event or experience "religious"? A simple question, but one that has spawned countless debates among scholars and the larger public alike. Religion is typically thought of as something unique and important. Religious events are understood to be located in special places set apart from ordinary life, places like churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues. Even when we find religion outside these venues, we expect it to be different from everyday activity, easily delineated from other domains of life. A prayer session in a public park, for example, is something much different from a pickup basketball game in the same location. Indeed, an important criterion for when an event or experience is typically deemed religious is its detachment from the normal, mundane activities of day-to-day life. This conceptualization of religion in scholarly thinking is of course rooted in Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) absolute separation of the sacred and the profane. Today, the common advice to "set aside" time to meditate or pray in many religious traditions reflects the view that religion is something set apart from the ordinary and everyday.

How, then, do we make sense of situations where the line between the religious and the nonreligious is unclear? What do we make of a political speech made at a religious funeral, for example? Or a sacred song sung by a public school choir? These kinds of events are noteworthy, and often controversial, precisely because they challenge the imagined boundaries between the religious and public spheres. Does a political speech at a funeral service, as occurred when Minnesota senator Paul Wellstone died in 2002, render the event a political one? Does it diminish the religious meaning of the

event? Is a high school concert that features sacred music, as hundreds do annually across the United States, thereby a religious event? Does such music violate the boundary between religion and political institutions when performed in public schools?

Questions like these are not new, and they are subject to almost constant debate by clergy, politicians, and lawyers. They are also questions that scholars have taken up in earnest. A common structure of academic inquiry in the social sciences consists of examining a social phenomenon and then explaining what that phenomenon is *really* about. Thus we have studies of tastes in food being *really* about cultural capital (Johnston and Baumann 2004); working-class racism being *really* about declining social status (McVeigh 1999); debates over abortion being *really* about controlling white female sexuality (Beisel 2004). In the same mode, a demonstrably political speech at a religious service or explicitly religious music at a civil concert is taken as evidence that everything is not what it appears—that the event itself is *really* about something else.

This chapter suggests that the search for an underlying, "authentic" meaning behind a particular event or social experience leads us astray in understanding the relationship between religion, politics, and motivation. The spheres of religion and politics, although rightly kept analytically distinct, are often empirically intertwined. Sometimes this is due to the conscious interweaving of the two by religious or political leaders, but, more important, it occurs because the very definitions of religious and political activity are porous and shifting. What *counts* as "political" or "religious" changes for individuals through time and across different social situations. The difficulty in locating and defining a clear boundary between the two is more than an analytic inconvenience; the blurring of religious and political spheres is a key source of change in the modern world. In particular, contemporary social movements rely on the adaptability and mobility of symbols and meanings across the boundaries of these two domains in their efforts to achieve their goals.

This chapter analyzes the relationship between religion and the contemporary pro-life movement in the United States in order to develop this idea further. Many view the pro-life movement as a virtual adjunct to religious institutions—a movement rooted organizationally in churches, populated by activists with deep religious commitments, and supporting a moral position derived from the theology of conservative Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant traditions.[1] Religion *is* important within the pro-life movement, but it is not nearly as encompassing as this conventional wisdom suggests. Both politics and religion "happen" within the pro-life movement, and the relationship between the two—and how each affects the other—is one of its most interesting aspects.

This analysis draws on data from a more general study of mobilization within the pro-life movement. In-depth, life history interviews were conducted with eighty-two activists in four locations: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Charleston, South Carolina; the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; and

Boston, Massachusetts. Activists were identified using snowball techniques, with a focus on including a wide range of ages, religious backgrounds, degrees of involvement, and types of commitment. Interviews were conducted in a semistructured format designed to collect detailed information about the participant's personal biography, relationship to the pro-life movement, involvement in other social movements and political and civic organizations, beliefs about abortion, and relationship to religious institutions and ideas. Interviews typically lasted between two and four hours.[2]

Personal Grief and Political Statements

My interview with Kimberly, a thirty-one-year-old married homemaker in Minneapolis, was typical of many interviews I had had with pro-life activists in the study. We were at her home, sitting on a large screened porch as she described her involvement in a local independent church. About an hour into the interview I asked her if there had been particular moments in her life when her religious faith had grown or changed in any way. She responded by sharing with me an extraordinary account of her experience with a life-threatening pregnancy the previous year. She described the events in detail over the course of the next ninety minutes. Kimberly became pregnant soon after her marriage two years previously. Unbeknownst to her or her doctor, however, it was a tubal pregnancy that ruptured and continued to develop in her abdomen, outside of the uterus. Ultrasounds and other tests failed to detect the problem for almost four months, as she experienced excruciating pain and became increasingly incapacitated. The pregnancy was finally terminated in emergency surgery that she credits with saving her life.

After relating this story, Kimberly produced a thick yellow-flowered photo binder. The binder contained dozens of pictures of the unborn child that had been recovered from the surgery, dressed in a stocking cap and blankets used for children born prematurely. The composition of the pictures was the same as you might find in any picture book for a newborn, including pictures of Jeremiah (the name Kimberly and her husband gave him) being held by Kimberly in her hospital bed, husband at her side, pictures of relatives with Jeremiah, and pictures of hospital staff who had helped her through the ordeal. Both she and her husband are smiling throughout the album, like proud parents would be in any baby picture book.

None of this appeared at all disconcerting or incongruous to Kimberly, the two of us sitting on her porch, drinking lemonade, looking at pictures of fifteen-week fetal remains. She told the story as a religious story, in response to a question I asked about her religious faith. As Kimberly explained:

> I knew that He knew Jeremiah since the day that he was born. He knew that he wasn't in the womb, and that his days were ordained.

> And I think the sovereignty of God helped both Jim [Kim's husband] and I cope with that loss. Because God knew. He knew that his days were going to be as many as they were. He knew that he was going to be outside of the womb. And actually I've seen God use that a lot too. We had a memorial service, and one hundred people came, and we did a graveside burial and stuff for him.

The issue for Kimberly is not one of politics. She normalizes and makes sense of her pregnancy experience through her religious faith. For her, the loss of a pregnancy—even in the fifteenth week—is no different than the loss of a young child after birth. Treating the tragedy in this way was her way of coping with what happened. It included not just taking pictures to show to others but also holding a memorial service to publicly mourn their loss. The resulting funeral service was, for her and others, a deeply religious event.

These kinds of memorial services occur regularly within the pro-life movement. Activists understand the events as necessary rituals for reconnecting with God and one's faith. "It does become a religious issue; it does become a faith issue," explained Nicky, a thirty-seven-year-old woman in Charleston. She described a funeral she once attended for an aborted child: "They had a whole church service in this huge Catholic church. It was a sunny day and they had the baby in a little tiny silver casket. The casket was up at the altar, but the church doors were open and a woman just walking by saw that little casket and came in." The woman who entered became an activist in the movement after attending the service—and confessing to the priest that she had once had an abortion. For Nicky, this is confirmation that God makes a purpose for everything: "This is what I mean about the sovereignty of God and God's economy of things. If you could only have eyes to see, I think people would see these things happen every day." Funerals within the context of the pro-life movement are religious events in every respect. They frequently take place in sacred spaces such as a church; they are presided over by regular priests, pastors, or other clergy; and they incorporate all the same symbols and rituals (casket, sacred songs, eulogies, etc.) found in a usual funeral. Most important, people attend them *as* funerals and are affected in the same way they would be at any other such service. People cry at funerals for aborted children; they comfort each other; they pray to God and sometimes question God. In other words, these services are deeply meaningful to many; they are genuinely and profoundly religious events.

It would be naive, however, to conclude that religion (and coping with grief) is *all* these funerals represent. After all, I learned about such services, and attended several, in the context of interviewing pro-life activists—people who are part of a social movement that has, at least in part, explicitly political goals. Nicky's description here hints at a more instrumental purpose for such services beyond their religious meaning: they serve to recruit people into the cause. The open doors and the "tiny silver casket" caught the attention of the

woman walking down the street. Such funerals are often organized and managed by movement leaders, even if the actual event itself is led by a clergyman.

Funeral services are important to the pro-life movement because they publicly establish the humanity of the fetus. They are a ritualized demonstration that an unborn child is no different than any other human being, whose loss should be mourned through the symbols, rites, and emotional displays of a funeral. Such services are also important because they are an opportunity for movement organizations to draw large numbers of people to an event and attract media attention.

Activists within the movement devote considerable time and effort to making these funerals possible. One student I spoke to in Boston was part of a campaign to scour the garbage cans of area clinics that performed abortions, believing she could locate fetal remains that might be used in funeral services. Others work on related events, such as setting up mock graveyards in public parks and college campuses. Fund-raising for movement organizations lies behind all these efforts, including the staged funerals. In the Twin Cities, Pro-Life Action Ministries is raising money to establish a permanent Chapel of the Innocents to remember aborted children. Its June 1999 newsletter describes the chapel this way:

> At the beginning of this year, through the generosity of two families, we were able to purchase the property next to the Robbinsdale abortuary. Our plan is to use this as a memorial chapel to the aborted babies. We intend for it to be a place of prayer, where Christians from all denominations can come and offer prayers for an end to the killing of defenseless babies by abortion. We are also setting aside an area as a memorial to the aborted babies, keeping alive their memory through pictures, plaques, and other memorials. We envision this as not only showing the reality of what abortion is, but also as a means of healing for those who have been involved in abortion.

The last line of the newsletter description recognizes the dual nature of the chapel. On the one hand, the organization is quite clear that it intends the chapel to serve a political purpose—that of "showing the reality of what abortion is." On the other hand, it also intends to create something that serves the religious purpose of repentance and rejuvenation—a "means of healing for those who have been involved in abortion." Thus, these same funerals and other services that hold such deeply religious meaning also hold obvious and explicit political meaning as well.

The Polysemy of Experience

So are these funerals and other kinds of services and memorials ultimately religious events or political events? Even the cursory description I have given thus

far suggests the question is a futile one. Pro-life movement funerals have important elements of both religious and political spheres. Most important, they have both religious and political meaning for those who are involved. The events are *polysemous*; they have multiple—and in some cases competing—meanings. This concept of polysemy is not new to anthropologists or literary critics; it is a concept with an established history in these disciplines.[3] The sociological study of religion, however, has largely ignored or explained away the fact that religion in the modern world frequently overlaps other spheres of activity.[4]

This long-standing blind spot in the literature has been reinforced by market-based conceptualizations of religion that see a religious market providing religious goods to consumers (Finke and Stark 1992; Warner 1993; Iannaccone 1994). Such a conceptualization keeps Durkheim's ([1898] 1975) presumption that modern religion is something essentially private and personal. Anytime religion is observed outside the private and personal, therefore, it comes as a surprise and is analyzed in terms of how and why religion has crossed an important and clearly delineated boundary.

What happens empirically, however, is more than simply religion being injected into "other" domains, or religion providing a cognitive or affective overlay for "other" (read: public) issues. Events, experiences, and entire social situations can rightly be a part of multiple domains simultaneously. Activity within the pro-life movement frequently takes on this polysemous character. Events are not really political with a religious veneer or vice versa; instead, they are irreducibly political at the same time as they are irreducibly religious. This is not true only of funerals but also of other movement events, including demonstrations, vigils, statehouse rallies, fund-raising campaigns, and ordinary organizational meetings.

Prayer, for example, is a common ritual in many religious traditions. It is also a common feature of most pro-life events. Prayer at pro-life events represents more than simply a marker that the people involved hold a religious faith; it is an integral part of their efforts to end abortion. Many see prayer as a bona fide tactic for achieving the goals of the movement. Rosaries for Life, a pro-life organization in the Twin Cities, does nothing else besides pray outside of abortion clinics. Prayer for many activists is action intended to have very this-worldly consequences. They expect prayer to lead to a real, measurable change in public policy or a decline in the number of abortions. "I would say prayer should be the beginning, middle, and end of any kind of serious approach to the abortion issue," one activist in the Twin Cities told me. Another in Boston believes that one day the movement will be able "to pray the abortion clinics out of business." Still another reasoned that it was prayer that led to the fall of the Soviet Union, and so too would prayer be the strategy that ultimately will end legalized abortion. Prayer in these cases does not simply justify social movement activity or give it meaning; it *is* the social movement activity. The act of prayer in such cases is simultaneously a political and a religious act.[5]

The polysemy of social movement events occurs in situations more mundane than funerals or even prayers at a rally or protest. The vast majority of the time activists spend on movement activity is spent in meetings—organizational meetings, board meetings, planning meetings, fund-raising meetings, envelope-stuffing evenings, and so forth. As in any social movement, activists spend an enormous amount of time just among themselves, discussing the abortion issue and exchanging ideas, beliefs, and experiences. The similarity between this coming together of activists and the gathering of the faithful in Christian traditions is not lost on those who are involved. "To me it's fellowship," said Jean, a forty-six-year-old Baptist in Oklahoma City, in describing a recent pro-life event. Others talk about social movement activity being all about "neat Christians," "communing with other Christians," or "standing lovingly together." What constitutes gathering of the flock in a religious sense and mobilizing social movement activism in a political sense is blurred even in these ordinary movement gatherings.

Polysemy in the social movement events described here can also be viewed from the other direction: seemingly religious events that also carrying a strong political meaning for those with "ears to hear." This is often as much in the absence of a gesture as in its presence. A Catholic priest in Charleston explained to me that the religious views expressed by many clergy in the area were affected by political pressure and the desire not to make religious services "controversial." The religious sphere is thus not an island in the social landscape; just as it regularly overlaps with everyday life, so too do politics and other social domains affect what is considered appropriately "religious."

Similarly, civil religious observance can also be political argument. Henry, a fifty-six-year-old Anglican in Oklahoma City, was incensed as he explained to me that the Oklahoma City Memorial—which pays tribute to those who died in the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building—contains only 168 chairs rather than 171. To him, the failure to include chairs for three unborn children who died in the building represents a political statement in what is otherwise sacred, religious space.

The Power of Ambiguity

So what does all this mean? My argument thus far has been that religion does not exist in a discrete, tidy social box. The religious domain frequently overlaps with other aspects of social life. Events and experiences in the social world take on multiple, yet equally genuine, meanings. Understanding religion today thus requires that we take account of this polysemy and the complicated ways in which religious beliefs, rituals, experiences, and expectations overlap other domains of life. But why is this important? Why does it matter that the religious landscape is considerably more complex than the way in which we typically view

it? The blurring of the religious and the political is not simply a scholarly curiosity or a problem of classification or typology. The polysemy of social situations, and in particular pro-life social movement events, is a key concept in understanding social change. Put simply, the very ambiguity we face in classifying events as religious or political is a basis for the power such events have to be transformative.

Most obvious is the simple leverage religion provides to political messages. By having a religious as well as a political meaning, activists invoke the sacred and transcendent in their advocacy for legislative or constitutional change. In some cases such leverage is actively sought by activists, who instrumentally use religious language, imagery, and rituals to establish movement activities as meaningful to a religious constituency. This is the kind of leverage pro-choice advocates have repeatedly identified and decried in the pro-life movement for the last several decades. Far more common, however, are activists who themselves move easily between political and religious meanings in discussing the abortion issue.

Many activists freely discuss politics and religion interchangeably when addressing abortion, suggesting that they see little difference between the two. When asked if abortion should be illegal, Danny, a teenage activist in Charleston, put it this way: "The issue is should the child be able to be killed and at what age. Who are we to legislate when a child deserves to die or not? We're not God. We're not omniscient. We don't know these things." Danny moves seamlessly between his ideas of what should be legal and his ideas about God. For him, the overlap between the political and religious meaning is self-evident and natural. Others are more explicit about making the case. "This is America, you know," explains Dominique, a forty-eight-year-old Baptist in Oklahoma City. "The foundation of the country is built up on the word of God. And if the Constitution is built up with the Ten Commandments, and 'Thou Shalt Not Kill,' they should stop it [abortion]. They should make it illegal." Here, too, Dominique is moving easily between politics and religion, the U.S. Constitution and the Bible, but in doing so she also makes the case this is the way we *ought* to be discussing the issue; that discussion of amending the Constitution *is* a religious discussion because our politics are built on a religious foundation.

Other activists acknowledge that such overtly religious arguments for legal change may be disadvantageous. They themselves see abortion in primarily religious terms but draw on political meanings to leverage their appeal. "I think the pro-life message can be portrayed and should be portrayed without as much of the religious bent," says Mariah, a twenty-six-year-old activist in Boston. "A lot of people don't have that same foundation. . . . But I mean it's a kind of basic civil right to have the right to life." Here Mariah draws on the political currency of civil rights language to advocate for a moral position she readily admits is, for her, tied principally to her religious faith.

Others see a legal ban on abortion not just as an end in itself but also as a way to draw people's attention to the moral problem of abortion. Richard, a fifty-seven-year-old in the Twin Cities, put it this way: "My perspective on law, if anything happens legislatively or congressionally, is as an educational function. We sometimes forget that the law has an immensely important role to play in educating people. And I would value a law primarily for its educational function . . . as to this is what is important for society, this is what we should value in society." Richard's perspective is one in which political changes will serve as a moral guide to people, not simply as the legal enforcement of morality. It is a view that seeks to use the political sphere to leverage changes in the religious sphere.

Polysemy also gives the pro-life movement the opportunity to aggregate multiple identities and multiple meanings in the same activities. Here the issue is not that individual activists reject the division between politics and religion, as in the cases of Danny, Dominique, Mariah, and Richard. Instead, activities can have much different meanings to different participants involved in the same social situation. For some participants, an event may be a political act; for others, the same event may be almost entirely religious. It is not necessary for everyone to accept the same package of meanings.

The pro-life funerals described earlier hint at how this aggregation works in practice. For some, such funerals are staged political theater, designed with specific political goals in mind. Others, however, experience these memorial services as primarily or even exclusively spiritual events. The funerals held for two children of Norm Coleman, a current Republican U.S. senator from Minnesota, provide a good example. Coleman and his wife lost two of their four children shortly after birth due to genetic problems that are routinely detected during pregnancy. In both cases, the family chose to carry the affected pregnancies to term, care for the children as long as possible, and hold funerals and mourn their deaths. The Coleman family made these choices on the basis of strongly held religious beliefs rooted in his wife's Catholic faith. These personal events had little to do with Norm Coleman's political career. Indeed, during this time Coleman was a well-known Democrat in Minnesota for whom opposition to abortion was not a winning issue. In fact, he believes his personal beliefs about abortion and opposition to the pro-choice Democratic platform played a role in his 1993 defeat in the St. Paul mayoral race. "I mostly feel great sadness about the issue," he explained to me in 1999, adding that "abortion diminishes us all."

The funerals for the Coleman children were religious rituals that helped begin the healing process for family and friends after an enormous loss. The services were more than this, however. Many people took a political meaning away from these funerals, perhaps because of Norm Coleman's status as a public figure. I spoke to several activists in the Twin Cities who saw the actions of the Coleman family as moral confirmation of their political views about abortion. In

other words, they interpreted the funerals as politically important irrespective of how the Colemans themselves might have interpreted them. Patricia, a fifty-five-year-old activist in the Twin Cities, invoked one of the funerals when I asked her whether there were any circumstances under which abortion should be legal:

> I was at the [Coleman] funeral, it was at the cathedral, it was the most beautiful, holy Jewish/Catholic funeral to say good-bye to this beautiful baby, and the baby was gorgeous. . . . This baby was born dying, but they don't regret that. They don't regret not saying, gosh we should have chopped that baby in pieces so we didn't have to put up with a dead baby, or a baby that was dying. They all felt so good to know that that baby felt loved from the moment of conception all the way through to the moment of death. And that's the way we pro-lifers look at things.

For some, the funeral was primarily—and perhaps solely—a religious or spiritual event. The meaning it held drew on ideas of loss and grief and faith and God. For Patricia and others who attended, however, the event was political proof that abortion is wrong and should be illegal. The meaning for her was, at least in part, political.

In these cases, not everyone takes away the same meaning from the event—not everyone sees both its political and religious implications. From the perspective of a social movement, however, unanimity of purpose among participants is not necessary; not everyone must agree on a single unified interpretation. The diversity of meanings leads to greater participation and a greater potential impact.[6] It is common, for example, to find Catholics praying the rosary in front of women's clinics during abortion protests. Their understanding of the situation is reflected in the explanation by Helen, an eighty-two-year-old Catholic in the Twin Cities: "At the noon hour, after we finished our meal, some of us would go to the Ford Parkway [women's clinic] and pray the rosary there. And others could opt to stay in the church and be in the chapel there, we'd pray the rosary there. Fifteen decets for that purpose." Helen and many others like her have little or no connection to pro-life organizations outside the church. They know how to say rosaries, and they understand rosaries outside of an abortion clinic as simply an extension of rosaries performed in a chapel.

Those involved in such prayer seldom talk to the more boisterous protesters at the clinics; indeed, they find such direct action at best distasteful. Nonetheless, they are part of the social environment that is created by the pro-life movement outside of women's clinics around the country. Despite their much different attitude toward action at the clinics, they contribute to the overall protest simply by being there. The overall protest is one in which some engage in activity that looks political, while others engage in activity that looks religious. Some will derive political meaning from one or both kinds of activity, whereas others will derive religious meaning. The blurring of the boundaries

between these two meanings aids the pro-life movement by making different kinds of action possible and multiple kinds of meaning plausible.

Changing Meanings, Changing Minds

Different interpretations and differing meanings do not always stay separate. Polysemy in social movement events can also lead to outright conversion of an individual's understanding of the abortion issue. This is perhaps the most interesting implication of the overlap between religious and political meaning. Polysemy introduces both ambiguity in social situations and multiple nodes of meaning that can cross-fertilize one another or be used by religious or political entrepreneurs to change peoples' definitions of the situation. A person who attends a pro-life funeral with a religious understanding of the event might come away from the experience with some of the political meaning also embedded in the memory. At least as intriguing is the opposite possibility—that some might be engaged in pro-life movement practices as a committed political activist and through his or her activism come to discover the religious meaning of those same activities.

My data show that this process does occur in the pro-life movement. Some people who get involved in a religious event come to realize the political implications of the activity. This was the case for Fred, a fifty-two-year-old in Charleston, who first attended a "Chain of Life" event that he learned about through his church. "The object of it was to stand there and hold hands and pray," he explained. "I thought it was to eventually have a chain of people across the state." He originally participated with a primarily religious understanding of the event. Soon, however, his interpretation became increasingly political. First, it was the many signs that other participants were holding, signs with explicitly political messages (e.g., Overturn Roe v. Wade Now!) and others linking the religious to the political (e.g., God Is Pro-Life). Then he learned more about abortion, and in particular late-term abortions, from others who were involved in the event. Although originally a religious participant, Fred was won over to a more political interpretation after he began talking to and forging relationships with others. This change reverberated through many of his volunteer activities, as he began to take an interest in the pro-life movement and regularly attend pro-life rallies and other political activities.

We are accustomed to thinking about ways in which a person's religious faith might lead him or her to become politically involved in the pro-life movement. What has received far less attention is the fact that the same process also works the other way. If religious and political meanings overlap in social spaces, there is no reason experiences originally understood as political might not take on religious meanings for some. In fact, several of the people I spoke to were committed secular activists in the pro-life movement before finding religious significance in their movement activity. Linda, a fifty-two-year-old activist

in the Twin Cities, had long ago dismissed the relevance of religion to her life when she first became involved in pro-life activism. Indeed, the religiosity she encountered in the movement made her uncomfortable:

> I was real embarrassed to be with people who would say, " 'God bless you." I mean, I thought that was something you said when somebody sneezed, but not when you said good-bye and "God bless you." That was just kind of foreign to me; my family didn't talk like that. And in the pro-life movement I started meeting evangelical Christians who would talk about what the Bible says, and I never knew what the Bible said.

Linda went from this position to a newfound religious faith rooted in her repeated involvement in pro-life political activity. "All of a sudden I thought, my God. My God!" she explains. "And I got down and I had this conversation, people call it a conversion experience, and all of a sudden I realized that God loved me just the way I was." Linda's religious faith is important to her today, and she is an active participant in her new church. She has continued her pro-life activism, but it has taken on a much different—more religious—meaning than it had before.

Linda's experience is not unique. In fact, almost one in five of the activists I interviewed came to their current religious faith either contemporaneous with or after the beginning of their involvement in the pro-life movement. The connection between religion and activism is more dynamic and causally more complicated that the conventional view of the pro-life movement suggests. Activists who participate in the polysemous discussions, meetings, events, and campaigns of the movement are not simply influenced by religion; they are also simultaneously reinforcing the vitality of religious faith in their own lives and in their social worlds. In doing so they change their religious commitments or, in some cases, create them where they never existed before.

The reality of religion in the modern world is that the distinctions between the religious and nonreligious spheres are not nearly as clear as we typically expect. The issue is more than one of definition. Social movement activity can be both religious and political at the same time. This fact changes the layers of meaning available to social movement participants and can lead to the strengthening of their political or religious identities not only within the movement but in the rest of their lives as well. The power of religious practice to affect political action and—less frequently acknowledged—the power of political action to change religious faith both lie in the polysemy of social experiences.

Conclusion

One important implication of this argument is that human agency in effecting change can be located in the spaces where multiple meanings overlap, where

actors actively manipulate, manage, control, and/or influence events in order to affect how a situation is understood by others. The manipulation, modification, and synthesis of meanings need not always be conscious attempts to exercise power, however. Another implication of this argument is that many social situations require negotiation and experimentation with multiple meanings by those who are involved. Polysemy creates conditions that are especially pregnant with the possibility of new meanings and new potential patterns of action.

Another way to think about this idea is that meaning is unevenly distributed among actors in a particular situation. We cannot know, as an observer, what any situation "means." By insisting on a sharp line between religious and nonreligious meanings, we miss the myriad ways in which the domain of religion regularly overlaps with other domains of life, and thus the ways in which each domain affects the others. In missing this overlap, we also miss how individuals interact with their environments and with each other in ways that can change both themselves and the larger society. Sometimes a funeral is much more than just a funeral. In the case of the pro-life movement, religious rituals and political activism are at times irreducibly one and the same thing.

Taking the polysemy of social events seriously reveals that the religious domain is not limited to private beliefs and worship set aside in specially designated churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. Instead, religion is intricately intertwined with every other social domain, including the public square, personal relationships, the economy, and the academy. Recognition of polysemy in many different situations also affords us the possibility of clarifying the mechanisms by which attitude change takes place, the relationship between beliefs and behavior, and the possibilities for individual agency within different sets of social structures. In other words, the overlap between religion and other social domains is more than a story of how the world is more complicated than we generally allow for; recognition of the layered meaning of everyday action actually provides us with a hook to improve our conceptualization of religion and our models of the larger social world.

NOTES

1. Some of the most well-known statements of this perspective include Luker (1984), Blanchard (1994), Ginsburg (1989), and Jacoby (1998).

2. Complete information on the study's methodology and sample is found in Munson (2002).

3. For the most part, however, the term *polysemy* in its anthropological and literary usage carries a connotation of bringing a subversive or oppositional meaning to social situations. No such connotation is warranted here; by labeling social events polysemous, I mean only that they carry more than a single valid meaning as understood by participants.

4. An important exception is Karen Fields's (1985) work on the Watchtower movement, which sparked my first thinking about polysemy.

5. Interestingly, previous major studies of the pro-life movement hardly mention prayer at all (Maxwell 2002; Jacoby 1998; Luker 1984; Ginsburg 1989). Ginsburg does discuss the importance of prayer in the movement but sees it as serving a solely symbolic purpose.

6. The social movement literature on framing generally assumes that movements are associated with a single, unifying frame (Evans 1997), but there is some empirical evidence to suggest that in fact large grassroots movements require managing multiple meanings and frames for multiple audiences (Munson 1998).

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8

A Place on the Map: Communicating Religious Presence in Civic Life

Paul Lichterman

The Problem: What Is Religious Here?

In 1996, leaders of the Urban Religious Coalition in Lakeburg,[1] a midsize, midwestern American city, were dreading a cascade of human fallout from the historic welfare policy reforms that were about to become law. A service and advocacy network of fifty local congregations, Urban Religious Coalition wondered how to respond to the new times. No one thought churches could or should "take over" social services as government responsibilities shrank. Coalition leaders did say from the start that religious people had civic responsibilities to the community at large. How would religious people act on those responsibilities? Coalition leaders envisioned one scenario in which neighborhood "clusters," alliances of congregations, would dedicate themselves to the well-being of neighborhoods where people especially vulnerable to the new policies lived.

Park Cluster was the first of these neighborhood alliances to materialize. It gathered representatives from eight, mostly white and middle-class, religious congregations: Episcopalian, Lutheran (ELCA), United Methodist, Presbyterian (USA), a Friends meeting, and a Unitarian fellowship. Park Cluster focused on the low-income black, southeast Asian, and Hispanic Park neighborhood that many Lakeburgers knew mainly from television crime reports. Very few, if any, Park residents attended Cluster churches. Very few, if any, Cluster members had other reasons to visit the Park neighborhood, whose location across a six-lane highway from most of Lakeburg's middle-class neighborhoods only accentuated its social distance from Cluster

members' daily lives. During the first two years of the Cluster, members and other volunteers from Cluster churches tutored Park kids in after-school programs and led nature walks. They supported neighborhood social workers and the Park Neighborhood Center by serving dinner and cleaning up at the annual Southeast Asian festival, the Christmas party, and other events.

Having started with these direct-service projects, the Cluster increasingly took on small-scale community development efforts. It tried to create new public resources for the neighborhood, consulting with neighborhood leaders, residents, and county services staff. It planned to cosponsor a "parish nurse" for the neighborhood, and it pooled money for an "eviction prevention fund" for residents about to lose their apartments. Frequently members discussed how to get Park residents involved in Cluster projects as agenda-setting partners rather than subordinates or clients. Eighteen months into my study, Cluster members were judging these projects to have been successful, if frustrating and slow-going. The parish nurse began working in the neighborhood, the Cluster was invited to seats on the Park Neighborhood Center steering committee, and Park residents began attending and speaking at the Cluster's monthly meetings.

As a sociologist, I was studying the Cluster because I wanted to understand how religious people enter civic life and what they do there. There are many kinds of civic action one could ask about, but I wanted to study religious groups reaching out and creating ties across big social divisions. Would a group like Park Cluster cultivate broad ties in the wider community, as prominent theorists have expected?[2] A variety of social scientists, policy scholars, and theologians—Theda Skocpol, Robert Putnam, Robert Bellah, Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin, Ronald Thiemann, and others—argue that religiously based groups have a potentially large role to play in strengthening social ties in society at large.[3] None advocate that the United States become a "Christian nation." They simply argue that, given American culture and history, there are widely shared religious traditions that can help people create broad social bonds. So I wanted to know whether or not religion helped Cluster members carry out their projects.

I had thought I would hear members talking about their work in Christian terms, at least once in a while. Here were white church people doing community service in a neighborhood whose most vocal leader, the neighborhood center director, promoted black separatism and sometimes scorned white outsiders. Wouldn't Cluster members invoke religious symbolism to steel their own commitment to a difficult cause? Cluster brochures called the group "faith in action." I assumed that I would hear people say they were acting on that faith. I listened and waited.

After eighteen months of Cluster meetings, I counted a total of five instances in which Cluster members affirmed a religious basis for action—in mostly jocular or indirect ways at that. In one instance, a member quipped that the Cluster needed to act on the "Christianity which comes out of our mouths."

She must have meant this figuratively, as self-deprecating criticism of well-meaning volunteers, since Christian expression very rarely came out of anyone's mouth. Another time, a fund-raising professional and new member of the Cluster said half facetiously that the Cluster ought to do for the neighborhood what "Jesus would do"; in the meantime, she suggested, the Cluster could do some fund-raising. There was one Methodist pastor's remark that God had put him in the place of working himself out of a job: if his efforts to strengthen the Park neighborhood succeeded, he would happily find some other line of work. And another member proposed at a committee meeting that the Cluster should take a "servant" role, among others. For Christians and Jews, servanthood is a common metaphor for one who carries out God's will, especially by humbly caring for others. And the Cluster started its monthly meeting with a prayer exactly once during my study.

The Cluster puzzled me in light of studies that show church-based activists and volunteers using rich, nuanced religious language, participating in rituals that energize them and stir newcomers to the cause.[4] Cluster members seemed capable of referring to religious teachings when I asked them to in interviews. Their brochures referred to Cluster members as "people of faith." But members did not sound religious at meetings; they did not sound driven by religious teachings. Were they really a secular group whose churchgoing members simply drew on familiar religious motifs once in a while? It seemed unlikely that their rare and casual forms of religious expression would help explain why they took up challenging community development goals in a neighborhood situated across huge social and cultural chasms from them.

Beyond "Why": Asking "How"

Often we assume that a group's religious character is interesting because religion influences the group's goals, or its success in meeting them. Sometimes we treat religion as a basic status characteristic, like gender or race. Other times we treat it like a fundamental worldview that shapes everything people do. In either case, religion is treated as a causal variable, even if it is an invisible one. We ask *why* groups do what they do, why they succeed or fail, and because we assume that religion is by nature a motivator, we wonder if religion is the cause of the action we observe.

I learned, slowly, that there are other questions to ask. We learn a lot when we ask *how* community groups use religious idioms. How do group members wear their "hats" as religious people? Do they all look like the pro-life activists Ziad Munson describes in chapter 7? If we grant that religion may be a regular part of public, community life in the United States, less privatized than classic secularization accounts would expect,[5] we need to know more about how it is present, what people are actually doing with religion in the civic arena. The

same religious beliefs may look different when brought to life in different places (Becker 1999; Lichterman 2005). In everyday community life beyond the mass-mediated world of skirmishes over abortion, gay marriage, and Ten Commandments displays in courthouses, religious expression circulates in different ways—sometimes very quietly. We cannot always know how religious, as distinct from secular, expression would look or sound.

I observed and participated alongside Park Cluster for nearly two years. The Cluster was one of nine church-based community service groups and projects in a larger study (Lichterman 2005). The groups and projects were mostly mainline or mostly evangelical Protestant, and all were responding, in different ways, to welfare reform or racial antagonisms. Over three years, I watched to see how they created, or failed to create, relationships across social, religious, and political divisions. I listened to how they articulated group projects in religious and secular terms, rather than assuming religion always was present just because my subjects were churchgoers. Using Park Cluster as its main case, this chapter offers what I will call a communication perspective on religion, which sensitizes us to the different things people do with religion in civic life. The chapter follows my shifting focus from "why" to "how."

A Communication Perspective on Religion

As Nancy Ammerman (2003) points out, it has been common sense to assume that religion gives people an unchanging core identity that defines the person in all social settings whether we see and hear the identity or not. This commonsense view of religious identity reflects the self-understanding of some religious people—that religion is something that is *always there*—but we can learn a lot when we listen to religious communication in particular settings instead of identifying it simply as "there" or "not there." Listening closely, we learn more about how a religious influence on action might work. Once we see and hear the different things people do with religion, we can better understand how religious expression might complement or inhibit different kinds of civic action. Then we are in a better place to come back and ask "why."

Communicating Goals in Religious Terms

Rather than study religion as silent values or beliefs we impute to people, some sociologists are probing the explicit religious communication we can hear in public arenas. Recent studies show us religiously based volunteer or activist groups using elaborate, emotionally compelling religious discourses to frame their goals of social justice or compassion. If language gives us the categories that make individual thought and choice making possible, as sociologists of religion have insisted,[6] then these compelling discourses are part of the answer

to why low-income parishioners participate in risky campaigns to pressure corporations or government officials to act for justice, or why volunteers keep coming back for the hard work of building new homes from the ground up.[7] We can use the communication perspective on religion to ask "why," and that is what I was doing at the outset when I expected that the power of religious language would help to explain why Park Cluster committed itself to community development over the relatively easier work of charity.

Nearly everyone in the Cluster supported the increasing investment in community development projects. Yet their mixed vocabulary of motives could have supported a variety of goals. In private interviews toward the end of my study, and in group brochures, members described the Cluster's work as "caring for our neighbors," "servanthood," "doing justice," "loving thy neighbor," "being a nurturant person," and "helping our neighbors build their community," among others. There was a very *loose* relation between these religious and secular terms, on the one hand, and the emerging, specific goals of the group, on the other. The religious discourse I heard in interviews or read in brochures would not explain the Cluster's choice of actions much better than the very scanty religious talk at meetings. Only one member ever quoted, in an interview, a biblical passage that affirmed anything specifically like community development; and only one Cluster member ever referred to a denominational initiative that closely complemented community development. In fact, it did not seem as if religion really mattered in this group—because I was assuming religion would matter only if it was directly relevant to *why* they did what they did.

Then I pushed the communication perspective further. I tried to think more about "how" people communicate religion, bracketing for the time being the question of their particular goals. I recalled, as students of urban church life would point out, that religious people and groups have a distinctive presence in civic life.[8] That religious presence can wield its own kind of symbolic power over other groups as well as group members themselves. Constructing a religious presence and defining goals for action are two different kinds of symbolic work, each with its own potential effects on collective action.[9] We need conceptual frameworks that help us appreciate each, separately.

Communicating Religious Presence: Who We Are and to Whom We Are Relating

Communicating religion involves signaling identities and relationships. As sociologists remind us, all public groups, secular or religious, construct their identities in interaction. Group identities are not simply natural or self-evident.[10] And as social historian Margaret Somers argues, identities are an integral part of collective action. Groups must know who they think they are if they are going to plan and act together (Somers 1994; Somers and Gibson 1994). Through symbols and stories, groups communicate to themselves identities that make

some kinds of collective action meaningful and other kinds hard for a group to imagine at all. Taking a similar, communication approach, social network scholars such as Harrison White and colleagues are understanding social networks as clusters of relationships with *stories* and *signals* that organize those relationships and distinguish them from other clusters (White 1992; Mische and White 1998). A group like Park Cluster may use religion in crafting the stories and signals that tell members and outsiders who the Cluster is and how it relates to other groups.

This sort of identity work would be overlooked, however, if we assume that acting religiously must mean pursuing goals in line with explicit theological dictates. Recent scholarship has been pointing out that religion includes not only theologies or formal teachings—the "belief systems" we often access with surveys of private opinion—but also everyday practices and identities through which people live religion, beyond as well as inside congregations.[11] These are expressions of religious presence, too.

One need never say a word about belief, for instance, yet send the signal that one is a religious participant, and that signal has consequences. In American civic life, a person known to be a practicing Christian or Jew may enjoy others' respect or trust—or engender mistrust—because of the meanings others associate with being religious. The fact of having a congregational identity at all may help local religious leaders of different faiths trust one another enough to work together (Warren 2001; Wood 2002). Municipal officials sometimes pay attention to local religious leaders by virtue of those leaders' social identities *as* religious people, apart from their particular beliefs (Demerath and Williams 1992). Religious identity sends signals inside as well as between groups. Social work scholar Ram Cnaan and his colleagues (2002) argue that many American religious congregations share a "norm of community involvement," regardless of their faith tradition. Americans learn, in other words, that being a member of a religious congregation *means* being someone who should get involved with other congregants in community service (cf. Ammerman 2005).

Returning to Park Cluster, we can ask now whether and how it may have been communicating religion in spite of what seemed like theological silence at meetings and a mixed vocabulary of motives in brochures and private interviews. That a group of mainline Protestants did not talk much about faith was not completely surprising. Other researchers have characterized mainline Protestants as less accustomed than other Protestants to using explicitly biblical or Christian language in settings outside church (Davie 1995; Cuddihy 1978). By listening more carefully, we might hear Cluster members expressing religious presence in the way they talked about their identity and their relationships with other groups, even without explicit affirmations of religious belief.

In the next sections I show how Park Cluster communicated religious presence in the way members talked about the group's own identity and its

relationships with other groups. Then I compare my findings with the religious communication I heard among different organizations in the larger study. Strikingly, the Cluster was the only group that was succeeding at relationship building on its own terms. How might this relate to the Cluster's communication of religious presence? This is not a question about program success or failure—my study lacks the sort of carefully matched religious and secular groups to make that assessment possible. I cannot estimate how much religious language about identity and relationships aided the Cluster's success if it did so at all. But I can suggest something about the way religious communication *complemented* civic action. As scholars and citizens alike continue to wonder what can strengthen civic connections between groups separated by social inequality or cultural difference,[12] we all might benefit from a bigger picture of how civically engaged people do things with religion.

Religious Presence: The Case of Park Cluster

Communicating Identity and Connection

The Cluster's brochure identified it as a religious group. It called members "people of faith" and put the motto "Faith in Action" on the front. What did "people of faith" mean concretely? One other group in the larger study identified itself as "people of faith," too. But that group did not expect members to represent congregations. Cluster members, in contrast, constructed their identity as an alliance of churches. They constructed the Cluster's religious identity in relation to a larger civic "map"[13] of Lakeburg, and for most members, the Park neighborhood they envisioned on that map was a *collectivity*, not simply an aggregate of needy individuals.

Two explicitly religious terms contributed to the Cluster's sense of itself and its connections on this map, even though the terms received very little elaboration at Cluster meetings. One was the notion of a parish. When Urban Religious Coalition leaders had envisioned congregational "clusters" working with and advocating on behalf of low-income neighborhoods, they had talked of a cluster's shared neighborhood as its "parish." Cluster members used the term, too. A Park Cluster brochure referred to the Park neighborhood as part of a "common parish" for Cluster churches. The implication was that the Cluster would act as a religious group serving a collectivity as a whole. The churches were as much as three miles from the Park neighborhood, but with this religiously based notion of civic responsibility, they drew a boundary around their shared neighborhood that included Park. It was in this context that the Cluster called the public health nurse it cosponsored for the neighborhood a "parish nurse." Although parish nurses usually are based in a congregation and serve

the congregants, the Cluster's parish nurse was not affiliated with any one Cluster church and served the Park neighborhood—the Cluster's "parish."

This terminology puzzled me at first. On the one hand, Cluster members made a point of telling me they did not intend to recruit people to their churches, but on the other hand, they identified themselves with a parish. I soon learned, however, that "parish" signaled that they were *church-based* people exercising a sense of social responsibility toward a neighborhood as a whole—not that they expected others in the neighborhood to take up their religious faiths. Speaking *from* a particular group identity is not the same as promoting that identity to an audience. Cluster members never *expounded upon* the neighborhood as a "parish" at any length. They did not articulate a theology of the parish. But their written materials referred proudly to the "parish nurse" and to the neighborhood as a "common parish." They were signaling quietly that the Cluster had a religious source for its sense of connection to a neighborhood.

The other religious term I heard was *social ministry*. Nearly two years before my study began, some Cluster members had met with outreach staff from the statewide council of churches. Council staff people presented a "social ministries grid," a set of questions meant to help volunteers in church-based service programs think about their role in the wake of welfare reform. Derived from the social gospel of early twentieth-century mainline Protestantism, "social ministry" calls Christians to bring about God's kingdom on earth by challenging unjust social structures. In this meeting with the council staff, Cluster members had developed questions to ask themselves about how they *presented themselves* in the Park neighborhood: Were they "partners" with the neighborhood, or was their relationship one of "givers and receivers"? Did they relate to existing neighborhood groups? Did the Cluster's agenda setters include representatives of the community?

During this study, these questions occasionally surfaced. Members did not use the grid to discuss what goals the group should pursue. Rather, it was a reminder of the group's identity, a way of *drawing boundaries on a larger social map*. The questions said more about whom to *be* than what exactly to *do* in the neighborhood. In the two years between the meeting with the church council staff and the group's transition toward community development goals, they carried out many direct-service volunteer projects. During one especially heated discussion, a member referred to "the social ministry grid" to support her argument that the Cluster should relate respectfully to the neighborhood, no matter whether it did direct-service volunteering or other kinds of projects. She instructed the group, to general approval, "we are not 'givers and receivers' but partners." Like the notion of the common parish, "social ministry" was a subtle tag of religious identity and connection, in relation to the Park neighborhood.

During my field observations, Cluster members never elaborated a *theology* of social ministry. Although Mark Warren (2001) found community activists who said they drew on the Bible to create a "theology of housing," I found the

Cluster's religious language spare, infrequent, and seemingly muted. Even though it might be tempting to conclude that the Cluster was really a secular group that simply happened to have begun with church volunteers, that would not be true to the identity they were communicating. If they were "really" secular, we would have to ask why each edition of the group's brochure bothered to call the group "faith in action." It would be unclear why members used religious tags such as "parish nurse." We might wonder why they consulted with a state religious council instead of a community organizing outfit. And why did no one but self-identified members and representatives of churches ever join the Cluster?

Religious identity, even in groups that begin as church-based initiatives, is not something we should take for granted. If the Cluster no longer wished to signal that it was religious, it could easily have avoided religious terms altogether. A program for "at-risk" teenagers in the larger study started as a church volunteer-based project, sponsored by the Urban Religious Coalition, but never used religious terms to describe its purpose at all. The teen project director told me that it made no difference whether or not her volunteers happened to come from churches. The religious identity of the Cluster, in contrast, seemed salient to members, but not in ways that a focus on religiously driven goals would illuminate.

Comparing Terms of Connection

Comparing Park Cluster with the other groups in the larger study reveals interesting differences in the ways religious groups use religious or secular idioms to articulate connections beyond the group. Park Cluster was the only group that consistently used a religious term for civic connections that it *valued*. The other Lakeburg groups either did not use religious terms for the ties they were trying to create, or used religious terms for the kinds of ties they did *not* value, or else switched from religious to secular language when relationship building became frustrating.

The Humane Response Alliance (HRA) was a coalition of church volunteers and social service and advocacy group leaders who wanted to create new connections between churches, food pantries, and county agencies. At monthly meetings, members, including the county social workers who attended, always identified themselves as "people of faith." They did not, however, use religious terms for the new relationships they wanted to build in Lakeburg. HRA's director liked to call the project "reconnecting the caring community." HRA participants were religious people but were not reaching out in a way one needed to comprehend in religious terms.

The Justice Task Force wrote position papers and created educational workshops about the corporate interests driving welfare reform. It put on the workshops at Lakeburg churches, and members of the task force identified

themselves as churchgoers, but rarely if ever did they characterize their goal of consciousness-raising in religious terms. The leading member called the task force a group of "prophets" on occasion, and other members agreed. But they did not *use* the term *prophet* to figure out how they should connect with Lakeburg congregations. The Task Force would *switch* to a more obviously religious language of compassion the few times they talked about reaching out to welfare recipients or administrators who had the unenviable job of enforcing a policy they themselves might not support. The group never dwelt upon compassionate caring, though, and some members seemed embarrassed to be discussing it at all because they thought that would divert their steadfast, critical focus on social-structural relationships. Relating compassionately to individuals was *not* the kind of connection the group set out to make.

Adopt-a-Family was a service project that paired mostly evangelical church volunteer groups with former welfare-receiving families. The groups aimed to support families whose household heads were making the transition to paid work. They offered to babysit the children while mothers went to look for work or bought phone service for a family, helped an older son who was applying for a license to study for the driving test, or accompanied mothers to doctors' appointments. At an orientation meeting, volunteers learned that they should serve the families with "Christlike care." No one could miss that the groups identified themselves in explicitly Christian terms. I noticed, however, that the more the volunteers talked about their awkward, difficult relationships with the families, the more they *switched* from a Christian language of compassionate servanthood to a much more secular language of "cultural differences." The terms of Christian servanthood seemed unsatisfying to frustrated, white, and middle-class church volunteers trying to create personal relationships from scratch with low-income African Americans. Members said at first about themselves that they needed to "up our compassion levels" in order to keep relating to the "adopted" families. But as the efforts wore on, I heard more and more about "cultural differences" and less about the call to Christlike care.

As Table 8.1 shows, Lakeburg groups did not all use religious idioms to describe their connections, even though they were religiously sponsored groups. Park Cluster used a religious idiom of connection consistently. Its bridge-building efforts *made sense* inside a religious story of caring for a "common parish." In Adopt-a-Family, the only other organization that gave religious language a big place in its relational repertoire, "Christlike care" made less and less sense when the receiving individuals did not respond as expected.

These observations enlarge our understanding of what religious people do or do not do with religion in the civic arena. Scholars of civic life often have cited Tocqueville's claims ([1835] 1969) that religion would make Americans more other-regarding and help them create broad social ties. But all the groups studied here could be called other-regarding, and yet they entered the civic arena very differently and had different experiences there. Adopt-a-Family was

TABLE 8.1. Languages of Identity and Connection in Selected Lakeburg Groups

Group	Religious Identity	Main Terms of Connection
Humane Response Alliance	Individual "people of faith"	"Reconnect the caring community"
Justice Task Force	Critical "prophets"	Raise consciousness subordinate terms: Christian compassion for victims of the social system
Adopt-a-Family	Christian servants	"Christ-like care" Crossing "Cultural differences"
Park Cluster	"People of faith" representing churches as collective wills	Partnership with a "parish" Respect for local groups

Adapted from Lichterman (2005).

a case in which religion seemed not to help civic actors create enduring bridges of any kind. Neo-Tocquevillian pronouncements on religion's civic value are not specific enough to be very useful. The religious terms identified in Table 8.1 are neither examples of rich, emotionally powerful religious discourses of social concern nor examples of elaborate, theological rationales. To understand how religion enters the civic arena, we have to listen closely to how a group's religious language enters the terms of identity and relationship, as well its talk about its goals. In the Cluster, religion worked in a quiet, mundane way. Members used only a spare bit of concrete religious language and imagery as they did their bridging work.

It is tempting to come back to the "why" question and suggest that Park Cluster's way of communicating religious presence helped it to reach out boldly and stick with its projects. Of the four organizations described here, Park Cluster had the most success achieving its goals and building the bridges it set out to build. We need more comparisons before saying why the Cluster succeeded and how much religion contributed to success. Following the communication perspective, though, it would make sense to propose that if religious groups are trying to create civic relationships *as religious groups*, they may be more successful if they can tell a "story" that makes relationships valuable in religious terms, apart from justifying the goals—strengthening health care, lessening homelessness—that they are pursuing. Otherwise, the work may not seem so meaningful or compelling. Sociologically speaking, religious groups identify with an ultimately *sacred* sense of duty, set apart from other kinds of obligation. If a group defines its actions as responding to God's calling, it may be less inclined to get invested in relationships with people who are not part of a common religious "story," though it may see those relationships as good on nonreligious grounds.

Conclusion

Whether or not religious communication helped or hindered the Cluster's and other Lakeburg groups' projects, these case examples show us different things people do with religion in civic life. The cases caution us against assuming that self-identified religious groups must always be using religious idioms for whatever they do. Two broader and perhaps counterintuitive lessons also emerge from the case of Park Cluster. First, a religious language of social connection does not necessarily threaten relationship building between diverse groups that do not share the initiating group's religious affiliation. And second, simple religious terms can articulate a commitment to social solidarity—in this case, supportive relations between churches and a neighborhood as a whole—that is different from either the compassionate care or righteous struggle we usually associate with religiously motivated efforts.

As sociologists move beyond simple versions of the privatization thesis and listen closely to religion in everyday life, we find that people weave religious communication into civic action in a variety of sometimes surprising ways. Small signals sometimes carry significant meanings. Listening closely to religion's different roles in civic interaction is essential before we can ask how *much* and in what specific ways religion matters for different kinds of civic action. Rather than issue blanket endorsements of "faith-based" (usually Judeo-Christian) civic groups, we need more nuanced and useful observations of how individuals and groups use religion to stake out places for themselves and others in civil society.

NOTES

Arguments in this chapter are adapted from Lichterman (2005), especially chapter 7.

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. Alexis de Tocqueville famously made this argument about civic groups in general, in *Democracy in America* ([1835] 1969), though other theorists have thought similarly. See the extensive discussion in Lichterman (2005).

3. See Skocpol (2000), Putnam (2000, especially pp. 408–10), Bane, Coffin, and Thiemann (2000), Coffin (2000), Thiemann, Herring, and Perabo (2000), Bellah et al. (1991, 1985).

4. See, for instance, Richard Wood's (2002) or Mark R. Warren's (2001) studies of faith-based community organizing, or Jerome Baggett's study of Habitat for Humanity® (2001).

5. See Luckmann (1967) or Parsons (1967); for an elegant statement of the role privatization plays in the secularization argument, see Casanova (1994). For a strong critique of Luckmann's privatization thesis, see Besecke (2005).

6. See, for instance, Bellah et al. (1985), Wuthnow (1991), or Tipton (1982); for an interesting counterargument about language and thought, see Bergesen (2004).

7. See Wood (2002), Warren (2001), Hart (2001), Baggett (2001).

8. See, for instance, Roozen, McKinney, and Carroll (1984) or Demerath and Williams (1992).

9. Scholars of social movements make the same point with a different vocabulary. See, for instance, Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994). For a parallel use of this insight to understand local religious groups, see Pattillo-McCoy (1998).

10. It is a widely accepted point in social movement studies. For reviews of social movement research on collective identity, see Polletta and Jasper (2001) or Snow (2001).

11. See, for instance, Ammerman (2003, 1997), Becker and Eiesland (1997), Bender (2003), or Orsi (1997).

12. On "bridging" ties between groups, see Robert Putnam's much cited work (1996, 2000; Putnam and Goss 2002), Wuthnow's discussion of bridging (2004), or the typology in Warren, Thompson, and Saegert (2001).

13. See Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) for close-up views of groups constructing and placing themselves on "social maps."

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9

Connections and Contradictions: Exploring the Complex Linkages between Faith and Family

John P. Bartkowski

Ramsey and Melissa Rogers have a problem, one not uncommon in American homes. Ramsey and Melissa find themselves having disagreements about money. Who should make the decisions about how the family's income is spent, and how should household purchases be prioritized? Who should handle the family's bookkeeping and bill-paying responsibilities? These are just some of the questions that bedevil couples in many homes. Ramsey and Melissa are no different. And yet, while the couple's struggles about finances are typical, they are hardly mundane. Ramsey and Melissa are both evangelical Christians, and their marriage is anchored in their shared religious convictions.

Ramsey and Melissa's dilemma is introduced here, and taken up again later in this chapter, as a means for reconsidering a series of important questions situated squarely at the nexus between religion and family life. First, how do religious couples seek to balance the demands of secular concerns and sacred convictions? What happens in homes when deeply held religious ideals collide with powerful elements of our secular culture such as individualism, consumer capitalism, and changing ideas about gender? Second, how are everyday household practices negotiated in light of the religious convictions that couples hold dear? Are religious beliefs straightforwardly integrated into domestic life, or are efforts to marry faith with family life fraught with difficulty?

This chapter seeks to shed light on these questions. To do so, I analyze marriage and family life through the eyes of evangelical Christian men. There is much to be gained by examining the faith-family nexus through the lens of evangelical Christian men's marital and domestic experiences. First, given the distinctively orthodox ideas about religion and family that pervade the evangelical world, at least among its most visible spokespersons (Bartkowski 2001), conservative Christian families provide an ideal opportunity to analyze adherents' efforts to negotiate between the demands of their religious convictions and the currents of secular culture. There is a balancing act endemic to the biblical imperative that believers should be "in but not of the world," and a careful analysis of religious adherents' efforts to navigate this razor's edge can tell us a great deal about how their faith influences their home life and vice versa.

Second, a focus on evangelical Christian men is needed to round out more than a decade of ethnographic research on conservative religious women. Prior research has revealed that women affiliated with conservative religions are not suffering from false consciousness.[1] Whereas it was sometimes previously assumed that conservative religious women were dupes of the patriarchal faiths with which they affiliated, careful ethnographies have revealed such women to be thoughtful and articulate in discussing their religious convictions, strategic in their motivations for affiliation, and capable of crafting gender and religious identities marked by fluidity and nuance.

Regrettably, much less is known about conservative religious men. In much of the work on conservative religious women, men affiliated with orthodox faiths amount to little more than an "absent present."[2] Given the male-dominated character of evangelical Protestantism, conservative Catholicism, and Orthodox Judaism, conservative religious men lurk in the background of such studies as arbiters of patriarchy against which women adherents strategically and sometimes subversively define their identities. Despite the understandable attention paid to such women, the question nevertheless remains: Do conservative religious husbands conform to the authoritarian model of male household leadership that one would assume goes hand in glove with adherence to a patriarchal faith? How are conservative religious men's ideologies and practices concerning family life informed by their religious convictions, and how are these convictions in turn shaped by secular culture?

To explore these linkages between faith and family, I analyze the stories that evangelical Christian men tell about themselves, their wives, and their families. I begin with the premise that narratives are "storied" in two senses. First, narratives are vital for organizing everyday experiences and imbuing life with meaning. Narratives enable storytellers to convey important cultural cues about who they are and who they are not, and to explain why certain courses of action are taken while others are averted. Experiences can be narrated, and hence ordered, in many different ways. Some narratives employ the logic of similarity, as is the case with analogies that highlight the bridges connecting various standpoints

and experiences. Other narratives draw on the logic of distinction and thereby underscore boundaries between different types of people and experiences. Thus, some narratives employ bridging discourse, while others reflect boundary work. Yet other narratives are predicated on the logic of transformation. Transformation narratives often begin with a problematic (dilemma) that leads to an awakening (epiphany) and ends with a resolution (denouement). In analyzing the stories that evangelical men tell, I pay attention to how the logics of similarity, distinction, and transformation are employed, and ways in which these narratives shape household interactions in families of faith.

A second characteristic of narratives is their "storied" (i.e., layered) quality. Like stories in a building, narratives often feature a variety of competing motifs and invite diverse interpretations. Thus, while narratives are an attempt to impose meaning and order on complicated experiences, they are ineluctably marked by contradictions, tensions, and ironies. In this chapter, I seek to unpack the layered logics woven into the stories that evangelical men tell about their home life. I do so not to suggest duplicity in those whose stories I recount here but instead to highlight the dynamic and complex character of cultural understandings about religion and family.

In short, this chapter uses narrative analysis to explore the connections and contradictions between faith and family. I use in-depth interview data collected from twenty evangelical men to examine these issues. While survey data highlight broad trends and general tendencies, interview data permit a more fine-grained analysis of the nuances and negotiated character of family relationships.

The men interviewed for this study were all affiliated with the evangelical men's movement, Promise Keepers (PK).[3] They were interviewed in 1998. Although men were asked about their involvement with PK, they were also asked about the general influence of faith on their marital relationships, and it is the latter constellation of questions that is the subject of analysis here. Because I seek to place the complexities of evangelical men's marital experiences at the center of this analysis, some of what follows features lengthy quotations. With other work having rendered broad portraits that compare conservative Protestant men with their nonevangelical peers (Wilcox 2004), I opt here for analytical depth that examines complexities embedded in men's stories of faith and family.

Strength and Sensitivity: The Layered Logics of Faith and Family

What words come to mind when one thinks of the typical evangelical husband? *Head. Patriarch, Authority.* Thanks to Focus on the Family, the conservative Christian organization that champions male "headship" in Christian households, but also to feminist organizations that decry such edicts as a throwback to nineteenth-century authoritarianism, these images of the evangelical Christian husband are etched into the American social imagination. Does this principle of

headship govern the relationships between the men that I interviewed and their wives? In a word, no.

To a man, my interviewees' narratives integrated traditional ideas about gender difference, popular in evangelical family discourse, with notions of masculine sensitivity rooted in the New Man ideal that has pervaded secular American society in recent decades (Wilcox 2004). The New Man is sensitively attuned to the needs of his wife and children rather than egocentric, willing to express his emotions openly rather than stoic, and governed by the sensibilities of egalitarianism and partnership rather than domineering. In defining the husband's role in the family, evangelical men stitched together progressive notions of male tenderness and expressiveness with more traditional notions of masculine strength. By melding traditional and progressive ideals, constructions of the "good Christian husband" in such narratives are layered. Moreover, such constructions utilize the logic of distinction by contrasting the good Christian husband with what might be called his "heathen" (i.e., non-Christian and self-centered) counterpart. (I use the term *heathen* as a thumbnail description for the archetype of the non-Christian husband to which many of my interview subjects referred. To be sure, they did not use the word *heathen*.)

My interview with Steve provides an excellent example of the antinomies of evangelical masculinity within the home, and of the boundary work used to distinguish Christian husbands from their non-Christian counterparts. Throughout our interview of more than two hours, Steve was not content to have me asking all the questions. When it came to discussing the connection between faith and marriage, Steve peppered me with questions. In one barrage, he queried: "What is it . . . that the Bible says that God wants a man to do what to his wife? What is [it that] he challenged [pause], commanded him to do to his wife? What is his responsibility?" Following a long pause that disclosed my obvious reluctance to respond, Steve proceeded to answer his own questions for me:

> To love his wife . . . Man is supposed to love the wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself to God. So sacrifice. We're supposed to sacrifice for our wives. Those are the three things that we're supposed to do. We're supposed to love them. We're supposed to sacrifice for them. That's just two things. And the third thing is [pause], let's see. Love, sacrifice [pause]. And we're supposed to be courageous. Why do you think he told us to be courageous all through the Bible? Not one time [in the Bible] did God tell a woman to be courageous. But all through the Bible [God said to men]: Be courageous. "Joshua, be courageous." All the guys in the New Testament. God commanded them to be courageous.

In short, Steve argues that a godly husband must exhibit love for his wife and must be willing to make sacrifices for her. Yet he must also demonstrate courage. Love and sacrifice mesh quite closely with the New Man ideal. New

Men are expected to exhibit emotional expressiveness and communicativeness, contrary to the traditional norm of masculine stoicism and insensitivity. New Men are supposed to be other-centered and self-sacrificing rather than narcissistic or selfish.

Curiously, though, Steve leaves the third component of being a good husband—that is, courage—ill defined at this juncture of the interview, other than saying that God continually told men in the Bible to be courageous. I press him on this issue. As Steve defines it, courage is manifested not in manly bravado. Rather, it is manifested when men exhibit enough backbone to choose family commitments over secular distractions such as careerism and recreation "with the guys." In this sense, courage circles back to love and sacrifice. Moreover, it is here in the narrative that the archetype of the heathen husband, designated by the reference to "most men," enters the fray. Steve explained:

> [A husband is] supposed to love her [his wife] as Christ loved the church and died for her. And we're supposed to die for [her] and sacrifice [for her]. Most men, if they had set a date or something on Saturday to go to the mall to shop with their wives and all of a sudden all the guys get together in their business and they're having a golf tournament and they need him to win this golf tournament, what do you think he's going to do when these two things meet? Most men [are going to say], "Oh honey, it [the golf tournament] is real important." You know, instead of saying, "No, guys. I told my wife I would go do this." They won't sacrifice for their wives. They sacrifice for themselves and do what they want to do. And when they do that, that tells the woman, "I love myself and what I want to do more than I love you." And so that's the reason most divorces are occurring. . . . Most marriages bust up for one reason: unforgiven sin. Unforgiveness. They either got mad at each other and they went on. . . . [Or] the husband never was courageous. [He never] went before his wife and said "I was wrong. I hurt you. I broke my wedding vows to you. I didn't honor you in this situation." And when you deal with a person that you love and you tell them, "Honey, I blew it, I was wrong," that helps to bring back the respect. But most men are macho and they can't admit they're wrong. And, you know, [they think] that means I'm weak. And yet the woman wants to see that he can admit that. Because if you do admit that and do come ask to forgive me, that means you do love me.

According to the layered logic found in Steve's narrative, men need to be both sensitive and strong. Steve resolves the apparent contradiction between these otherwise competing characteristics, thereby building coherence into his narrative, by arguing that good Christian husbands must place masculine strength (courage) in the service of marital sensitivity and humility. Thus, courage is measured by a man's willingness to embrace his family obligations

even when such a decision is not popular with his friends and colleagues—"the guys," who serve as the out-group against which the good Christian husband is defined. Moreover, courageous men are willing to "face up" to their mistakes and are "man enough" to ask for forgiveness when they have offended their wives.

Servant-Leadership: Refashioning Patriarchy for a Posttraditional World

When asked about a husband's role in the family, most of the men I interviewed invoked the concept of servant-leadership, a term that is predicated on an apparent contradiction. A husband both is a servant to others in his family and provides leadership to them. Here again is a layered logic that melds progressive ideas with more traditional notions. Yet, among most of the men who mentioned this term, servant-leadership in the home entails responsibility for other family members rather than authority over them. The husband is expected to "lead" in serving other family members and in ensuring that the needs of his wife and children—rather than his own wishes—are a priority. Servant-leadership is a cultural tool that evangelicals have crafted in the wake of feminist critiques of the patriarchal family. Such critiques have come from secular feminists, as well as their evangelical counterparts (Bartkowski 2001; Manning 1999). Moreover, servant-leadership reflects an attempt to steer a middle course between traditional evangelical ideas about husband headship and the secular, postfeminist New Man ideal that champions gender egalitarianism. In what follows, I describe how this middle course is navigated by evangelical men in the context of their marital relationships.

Matt's definition of this concept was typical in underscoring that servant-leaders are first and foremost involved in their families. What is particularly interesting in Matt's commentary is his argument that a husband's financial provision for his family does not give him a pass on involvement in family activities upon arriving home from his paid job. Matt described his perspective in this way:

> The best leader is a servant-leader. If you lead in serving, then [pause]. It's just like that phrase, you can't outgive God . . .
>
> *Bartkowski: So leadership does not necessarily entail decision-making authority in the home . . . ?*
>
> Not as much, although I think men need to be involved in decision making. [I am] not saying they don't. It's coming home prepared to get involved. Men have this concept a lot of times that they're the breadwinner and when they come home they deserve some rest. After all, they're bringing home the supplies, the very necessities of life for all the people that are there, and they should be served by them

> since they are supplying their needs. But that's backward. Those people—your wife, your kids—have also been through a day. Maybe not rough in the same way that yours was rough, but they've been through it. You should come home just as you are expecting to be served, willing to serve them. [A husband should be] asking, "What's the first thing I can do to help?" rather than, "How can you help me?"

In Matt's home, these thoughts are not idle musings. Matt's convictions on this score have been translated into action in his relationship with his wife, Becky, and his son, Will. Having previously invested himself quite heavily in his career, Matt now sets aside a specific amount of time—what he calls a "minimum requirement"—for Becky and Will each week. Matt's minimum requirement strategy for family involvement ensures that he is present in the home and connected to kin. Matt explained:

> The scriptures say that our wives are sanctified by the washing of the word [Bible]. If we would honor that promise and actually share the word of God lovingly with our wives, that would actually sanctify her. I've seen that. That promotes a oneness that we shared when we were married that I didn't realize that we had gotten away from with my long hours at work. It has also promoted the fact that I need to be home more often, you know. I need to spend more time at home. I now have a commitment of a minimum amount of time that I will be at home. I'm not going to commit to do anything else if that minimum hasn't been met.

In Matt's case, then, the neotraditional concept of servant-leadership gives way to progressive family practices.

It is worth noting that servant-leadership is not defined in the same way by all the men that I interviewed. Sociologists assert that cultural tools can be used in diverse ways even among persons sharing similar group affiliations (Swidler 2001), and evangelical Christian men are no exception. Although Matt's definition of servant-leadership stresses the servant side of this concept, a few men placed a comparatively greater emphasis on its leadership dimension. When I first asked Hal about a husband's role in the home, he was quick to identify servant-leadership as its foundation. However, his initial definition of this concept lacked the softer shades found in many other men's responses: "We [husbands] should be the leader of our home. You'll find many homes where the woman runs the house. She's the leader of the house. She takes charge and does this and that, right? But that's not God's plan."

As Hal provided more detail about the nature of servant-leadership, his rhetoric tacked (i.e., moved back and forth) between the traditional and the progressive. Initially, Hal enlisted the logic of analogy by comparing family life to the workplace and military, both of which operate on the logic of hierarchy and

authority. These analogies, of course, lend a brazenly patriarchal cast to Hal's understanding of marriage. Yet, in shortly thereafter referencing the need for a husband to have a "servant's heart," Hal wove self-sacrifice and altruism into his narrative construction of the good Christian husband, ultimately ending on a softer note than the one on which he began. Hal said:

> The man is to be the leader of the home and to make the final decisions. Now, if we love our wives as Christ loved the Church [and was] willing to die for it, what does it tell you about what decision you ought to be making? . . . Put it into practical terms, and it's this. First thing we have to realize is that marriage is not a fifty-fifty relationship at all. It's a hundred-hundred relationship. Anything short of that doesn't work. So, in the decision-making process, somebody always has to be able to break the tie. I don't care if you're in business, in the army, in a marriage. If you're in any relationship, somebody has to have the ability to break a tie in doing that. Now if we enter into that situation, both of us with servant's hearts, then I'm here to please you and bless you. Then my decision, though it's my decision to make, my decision is going to be in favor of you, rather than in favor of me. That's the difference.
>
> *Bartkowski: So, the husband, say, acting as say the leader, or the servant-leader, will opt for his wife's decision?*
>
> That's what Christ would call him to do. That's what Christ would call him to do. To make a wise, good decision. He would always give credence and try to bless and honor that which his wife and children would want to do.

Interestingly, not all the evangelical men interviewed for this study relied on the concept of servant-leadership to describe the husband's role in the family. When a husband's role in the family is not predicated on servant-leadership, it is organized around men's spiritual leadership in the home. Like servant-leadership, spiritual leadership entails responsibility for the welfare of other family members. Yet, spiritual leadership defines (and delimits) men's role within the family in sacred, religious terms rather than in terms of general decision making. A husband is a "priest" of sorts in his family.

Phil's remarks provide a good illustration of the perspective embraced by men who advocate the spiritual leadership perspective. When asked about the distinctiveness of his role in the family, Phil highlighted spiritual responsibilities that fall squarely on his shoulders:

> What I really do is I pray more. I pray more for my kids and pray more for my wife. I am the spiritual leader of the house. So anything that goes on in the house has to follow what the Bible tells us is true. I lead prayer sessions in the house. What we're doing is just doing the things

> that Jesus tells us to do. You know, love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. . . . I have a responsibility to be the church leader of the house. Whether or not I accept it or not, the Bible says it's there. I'm supposed to be the one who is in charge of the spiritual well-being of the household and by that [I understand that] I need to be leading the family Bible studies, praying for my wife and children.

It is noteworthy that Phil says that decisions made in his and wife Janice's family are predicated on "what the Bible tells *us* is true" rather than solely on what Phil thinks is best. Phil and Janice have faced some difficult decisions during their decades of marriage. Most recently, they have had to make a series of choices about whether or not to let their young adult son, who had developed a drug addiction that he is now trying to overcome, move back in with them. Although they did not initially agree on the conditions under which such an arrangement would be acceptable, they ultimately negotiated a solution that was workable for both of them. Male family leadership, whether or not it is preceded by the word *servant*, entails sensitivity, negotiation, and compromise.

Struggle and Transformation: The Dynamism of Faith and Family

Men's leadership, or servant-leadership, in evangelical homes is not a static entity. It requires an ongoing balancing act in which strength is counterbalanced by sensitivity, and it entails a great deal of striving, falling down, and charting new courses on the heels of failure. Thus, a holistic understanding of the faith-family nexus in evangelical families entails interrogating the process whereby husbands learn to balance the antinomies introduced into domestic life by secular pressures and sacred values.

To explore this process, we return to the story of Ramsey and Melissa Rogers, the narrative that was first raised at the opening of this chapter. Theirs is a narrative structured by a temporal sequence that moves from struggle to negotiation and ultimately to resolution. Ramsey's account of their difficulties with family finances underscores the dynamism that characterizes the relationship between religion and domestic life, while also demonstrating how the concept of the good Christian husband creates both struggles and opportunities for men.

Ramsey, a restaurant manager, has a sharp mind for business and finance. He is very "number oriented" and has prided himself on his responsible financial management. As Ramsey told me during our interview, he was "able to count every penny" with the budgeting scheme that he employed. When Ramsey and his wife, Melissa, got married, he was excited about taking on the family finances. With an outstanding track record of having never bounced a check and an array of money management strategies at his fingertips, he felt eminently qualified for the task. However, soon after marrying Melissa, Ramsey was presented with a

scenario he did not anticipate. Melissa proposed that Ramsey relinquish the management of their finances to her. Ramsey states that this change "was kind of a struggle the first month or so," even though Melissa, like Ramsey, was "number oriented." Why was it a struggle? "Because of pride," replied Ramsey.

If Ramsey was so concerned about Melissa managing the family finances, why did he agree to it? Although he does not say it in quite these words, it seems that this situation presented Ramsey with an opportunity to make a sacrifice for his wife and, in so doing, to communicate his love for her. Ramsey is quite clear that he lacked trust in Melissa, at least in this domain of their relationship. And he claims that his trust in God was not adequate. When I asked the motivation for the change of financial management, he stated:

> Well, because she wanted to do it. And once we got talking [about family finances], she wanted to be a part. You know, this is her talent too, and she wanted to be part. I think God was using me and using that as an opportunity. We're talking about the first three or four months of our marriage. I had to say [pause]. I had to turn around and trust my wife. And then again I had to turn around and trust God to make sure my wife was going to handle it.

Thus, Ramsey had entered his marriage proud—or, more accurately, prideful—about his financial management skills. Despite Ramsey's anxiety about having Melissa oversee their finances, he could not justify denying her the opportunity to do so without seriously considering her request. Of course, if Ramsey was a staunchly traditional (read, hard) patriarch, he could simply insist that family finances are a husband's domain. Money is men's business. End of discussion. But that was not the case. Herein is a critical difference between hard patriarchy and its "soft" counterpart (Wilcox 2004). Whereas hard patriarchy means that husbands need not explain the logic behind the decisions they make, soft patriarchy holds men to a different standard—one composed of love, sacrifice, and courage in the face of adversity.

And, indeed, it took considerable courage for Ramsey to relinquish control over the family finances. As Ramsey went on to explain, his wife's method of financial management was not as foolproof as his own. But, here again, the primary challenge in his eyes was not the development of a perfect financial record-keeping system but learning the larger lesson of trusting his wife and God.

> Now [after Melissa took over the finances], she [pause] we bounced a couple of checks and there were times that I wanted to blow my stack, because I never bounced a check in my life. I'm very careful on everything. But I had to trust her. She wanted to change banks, and we went round and round. And I just said, "Okay, God, I'm going to put my faith in you." It might cause a little strife, but I trust her and now she handles all this. I mean, we still communicate about it, but

she knows exactly what she's doing. I don't even look at the bank account. I get my weekly allowance or whatever. I say, "Honey, can I have twenty dollars? I need a twenty." And she doesn't have any problem with that at all.

Bartkowski: Is that hard for you, ever, to ask for the allowance or to turn over the responsibility?

It was at first, but now it's not. It's because, I guess you could say, I went through a transparency where I broke down the wall of pride in myself and I trust my wife. . . . It was a struggle at first, but God did a work in me on this to where I trust her with it and we're doing great about it now. I don't mind an allowance no more. Sometimes she turns me down, but I can try. [Laughs.].

Ramsey's narrative is quite revealing about one evangelical husband's struggles to put his faith into practice in the home. Ramsey's faith helped him to identify the source of his and Melissa's disagreements about family finances, that is, his pride concerning money matters. His religious convictions also indicated the proper course of action needed to resolve this problem, namely, greater self-sacrifice on his part and a stronger sense of trust in his wife. Ironically, the family's patriarch has relinquished control over the household finances and now receives an allowance from his wife. God "did a work" on him. And, as evidenced by the wide smile on his face as he finishes telling his story, he and Melissa have never been happier.

Conclusion

There is much to be learned about the relationship between faith and family from the stories that evangelical Christian men tell about their marriages. Most specifically, we learn something quite valuable about the effects that a patriarchal faith can have on family life. While scholars continue to debate the theological veracity and social implications of biblical references to headship (Blankenhorn, Browning, and Van Leeuwen 2004), there is mounting evidence that traditional gender ideologies in evangelical homes often give rise to progressive practices. As demonstrated in other work (e.g., Bartkowski 2001; Wilcox 2004) and augmented in this study, the male "leadership" said to pervade evangelical families is a peculiar form of patriarchy. It is a patriarchy in word coupled quite often with the practice of partnership.

The larger questions, of course, are why traditional ideologies give rise to progressive practices in conservative religious households, and what this paradox tells us about the relationship between religion and family life. To begin, then, why are traditional ideologies coupled with progressive practices in the homes of many conservative religious couples? There are likely several underlying factors.

First, as discussed convincingly in Gallagher and Smith's (1999) analysis of gender narratives articulated by conservative Protestant men and women, the traditionalist markers of "husband headship" and "male family leadership" symbolically distinguish evangelical marriages from their secular counterparts. Through such boundary work, evangelical couples are able to define their family relationships as different from those of the secular mainstream (Smith 2000; see also Gallagher 2003). Thus, the subjective identities of evangelical husbands and wives, and the collective identities they create as Christian couples, are marked as "other"—separate and apart from "run-of-the-mill" American marriages. The good Christian husband is a far cry from the heathen husband. Given the fact that many secular marriages today are governed by utilitarian individualism and self-fulfillment, evangelical couples take pride in swimming against the tide and seeking to create an ethos in which marriage is a sacred enduring obligation not reducible to the fancies of the individuals in the relationship. In this sense, evangelical marriages are rooted in a communitarian ethic in which self-sacrifice is valorized and divinized (Bahr and Bahr 2001).

Second, the boundary work accomplished through the retention of a patriarchal ideology has practical consequences. By most measures, conservative Protestant husbands and fathers are more emotionally connected to their families and more involved in household activities (e.g., Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2004). When the rubber meets the road in evangelical homes, symbolic traditionalism typically gives way to pragmatic egalitarianism (Gallagher and Smith 1999; see also Bartkowski 2001). In fact, survey research has shown that evangelical couples are no more traditional than their secular counterparts in the practice of household decision making (Denton 2004). This counterintuitive finding may result from the peculiar definition of male leadership in evangelical circles. Evangelicals seem increasingly inclined to define leadership not as decision-making authority but as servanthood (Bartkowski 2001, 2004; Wilcox 2004). The economy of gratitude that governs most secular households in which partners keep track of favors owed and privileges taken is transformed in evangelical homes into a economy of responsibility in which each spouse is encouraged to "outserve" his or her mate (Smith 2000; see also Bartkowski 2001, 2004). The end result of this culturally distinctive orientation toward marriage is the integration of husbands and fathers into the domestic realm in a way not seen in secular homes, despite the pervasiveness of the New Man ideal.

There is also a broader lesson for scholarship focused on the intersection of religion and family life to be taken away from these narratives. Scholars would do well to be as attentive to the contradictions, incongruities, and ironies that mark the faith-family nexus as they are to its more intuitive, coherent connections. A great deal of sociological research on the influence of religion on family relationships has shown that faith powerfully shapes ideologies and practices in the domestic realm. Where family life is concerned, religion matters. And yet,

"faith" does not always behave in a predictable fashion. Oddly enough, rhetorical vestiges of religious patriarchy can foster the practice of egalitarian family relationships, at least in circumstances such as those featured here. Religious words take on new meanings in everyday practice. Social actors, even those who share a common religious affiliation, may use the tools of their faith in diverse ways to solve the dilemmas presented to them by family life. In the end, the complex and even contradictory linkages between religion and family present scholars with challenges that are at once exciting and daunting.

NOTES

1. The earliest qualitative research on conservative religious women was Judith Stacey's *Brave New Families* (1990), followed thereafter by a series of studies, including Kaufman (1991) and Davidman (1991) (both focused on Orthodox Jewish women); Griffith (1997) and Brasher (1998) (focused on evangelical women); Manning (1999) (comparing evangelical Protestant, Orthodox Jewish, and conservative Catholic women); and Bartkowski and Read 2003 (comparing devout evangelical and Muslim women). More recent work has charged that the latitude for identity negotiation enjoyed by evangelical women may be overstated in earlier ethnographic accounts (Ingersoll 2003).

2. The phrase "absent present" is Derrida's, and is connected to his concept of "trace," which is best understood as "the word under erasure in writing" (Ritzer 1997). The trace of men in ethnographic texts on religious women consists of authorial representations of conservative religious men as the locus of patriarchal authority without any sustained interrogation of this construct. While it is indeed true that many positions of leadership are reserved for men in conservative religious traditions, the complexities and contradictions associated with male leadership are left largely unexplored.

3. See Bartkowski (2004) for research design considerations and sample characteristics.

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PART III

Producing Everyday Religious Lives

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10

Beyond Literalism: Reflexive Spirituality and Religious Meaning

Kelly Besecke

Q: One of my friends, who claims to believe in the inspiration of Scripture, doesn't believe that the story of Adam and Eve and the fall are to be taken literally. Does Scripture support his contention?

A: Absolutely not. To contend that Adam and Eve—and the story of their fall into a constant state of sin eventually terminated by death—are simply figurative allegory would contradict the whole of Scripture in a devastating manner.

This question and answer appear at the beginning of an article entitled "Adam and Eve: Fact or Fiction," by Hank Hanegraaff, known to Christian radio listeners as the "Bible Answer Man." Every day, Hanegraaff's answers to questions like this one are broadcast on more than a hundred radio stations throughout the United States. Hanegraaff's answer to this question continues by citing Bible passages in support of the theological importance and historical accuracy of the Adam and Eve story. He concludes that the literal truth of the Adam and Eve story is a necessary article of Christian faith.

> So you see, if you cast aspersions on the historical record surrounding Adam and Eve, you must also question the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the genealogical and archaeological accuracy of Scripture, the problem of sin, Christ's vicarious atonement, salvation by the grace of God alone, and much more. What you end up with could hardly qualify as Christianity![1]

Hanegraaff's argument is grounded in his religious faith, but its terms are embraced by people with very different commitments. In a debate entitled "Atheism vs. Christianity," Frank Zindler, editor of *American Atheist* magazine and director of American Atheists Press, echoes Hanegraaff's logic on every point:

> The most devastating thing though that biology did to Christianity was the discovery of biological evolution. Now that we know that Adam and Eve never were real people the central myth of Christianity is destroyed. If there never was an Adam and Eve there never was an original sin. If there never was an original sin there is no need of salvation. If there is no need of salvation there is no need of a savior. And I submit that puts Jesus, historical or otherwise, into the ranks of the unemployed. I think that evolution is absolutely the death knell of Christianity.[2]

For Hanegraaff, Christian faith is in conflict with, and more fundamental than, scientific history, so he urges his audience to reject the theory of evolution. For Zindler, science is both more compelling than the Adam and Eve story and a more reliable source of truth, so he urges his audience to abandon Christianity. The two men agree, however, on two points: first, the stories of Genesis and the story of evolution constitute conflicting descriptions of historical fact; and, second, acceptance of the scientific story requires a rejection of Christianity. Although many Americans might not be able to restate the precise logic of Hanegraaff's and Zindler's arguments, these two points of agreement are part of our national lore. The evolution versus creation debate is a familiar trope in American culture, as are its symbolic relatives, science versus religion and faith versus reason.

Against this cultural background, Lakeside United Methodist Church, a large downtown church in a small midwestern city, houses adult education courses with titles such as Faith and Reason and Reading the Bible Intelligently, which feature conversations such as the following:

> *Alistair*: We try to make the Bible answer our questions, without thinking about the questions the writers had in mind in the first century. An example of that is people reading Genesis to find out about evolution. That wasn't what the writers of Genesis were asking or thinking about. The fundamental message of Genesis is "behind this universe is God," which I believe very strongly.
>
> *Dan*: It doesn't bother me that the Bible doesn't answer scientific questions because science can't and doesn't try to answer the deeper questions of life and suffering and death.
>
> *Alistair*: Yeah, it's not a slap at all to say it doesn't answer scientific questions, because it's asking more profound questions. Science is

> only one, modern way of knowing, and we try to hold the Bible up to it as if the Bible was about that way of knowing, as if the questions the writers had in mind were scientific ones. What if instead, we think about the poetry of these stories?

Alistair and Dan are not trying to effect a compromise between scientific and religious worldviews; neither the legitimacy of science nor the importance of the Bible is called into question by this conversation. Rather, these men's assertions are best understood as challenges to a deeper *literalism* that underlies the assumption that science and religion must conflict. In the face of literalist religion and literalist science, they seek a third way, a different kind of wisdom.

This chapter is about people like Alistair and Dan—people who practice what I call *reflexive spirituality*. Alistair, Dan, and others like them look to religion for wisdom and meaning and reject literalistic approaches to religion that they see as preventing the possibility of the profound. They embrace the methods and discoveries of science, but they reject the assumption that the truths that can be found by science are the only—or even the most important—truths to be found. I borrow the concept of reflexive spirituality from Wade Clark Roof (1999), who uses it to describe an intentional, deliberate, self-directed approach to the cultivation of religious meaning. To be "reflexive" means to "step back" mentally from one's own perspective and recognize it as situated in an array of other possible perspectives. To be reflexively spiritual, then, is to maintain a constant awareness of the ever-increasing variety of religious meanings available in the modern world and to seek spiritual wisdom by intentionally but critically assimilating those meanings into one's own spiritual outlook. Roof describes reflexive spirituality as a way modern individuals bring religious meaning into their personal lives; for him, it is primarily an individual form of personal religiosity.

Here and in other work, I take the concept in a different, more cultural direction. Elsewhere I have argued that reflexive spirituality is a cultural language, a way that people talk with each other about transcendent meaning (Besecke 2001). It is not, therefore, personal so much as socially situated in conversation. Nor is it concerned only with individual growth and development. The discourse of reflexive spirituality represents a cultural project aimed at bringing an enhanced sense of transcendent meaning into the highly rationalized context of the modern United States. This project requires, among other things, the identification and criticism of cultural patterns that inhibit transcendent meaning; reflexive spirituality, then, is a language of cultural criticism as much as of personal meaningfulness.

Reflexive spirituality's cultural critique is directed at a collection of patterns I gather under the label *literalism*. This broad societal literalism shows up both inside and outside of religion and so fits neatly neither a "religious" box nor a

"secular" box. The people that I observed were convinced that literalism constricts the range and depth of possible meanings, and so were frustrated by the dominance of literalism in modern American society. They wanted to contextualize this literalism as just one interpretive system alongside other systems of interpretation that might expand the possibilities for meaningfulness.

My analysis of reflexive spirituality's cultural critique is based on observation in a variety of settings I studied in the course of a larger project that investigates the cultural possibilities for transcendent meaning in highly rationalized societies like the contemporary United States (Besecke 2002). In the course of this project, I visited places—some more conventionally "religious" than others—where people had gathered together to talk, or to hear others talk, about transcendent meaning. Some of the "reflexive spiritualists" I observed were members or leaders of a large urban United Methodist church I call Lakeside. Some were teachers or members of a suburban interfaith adult education center called Common Ground. Some were authors, speaking in public radio interviews or at workshops they were leading. And some were members of a diffuse "Spirituality at Work" movement, speaking among groups of businesspeople. In all these settings, I heard similar ways of speaking about meaning, similar criticisms of modern culture, and similar techniques of retrieving meaning from religious traditions and other traditions of modern society.

At Lakeside church, meaning was a regular topic both of sermons and of adult education courses. The Faith and Reason group included about twenty-five people who met for an hour monthly to discuss spirituality and the life of the mind. Three adult Sunday school classes, Reading the Bible Intelligently, Theology for the Twenty-first Century, and Religions of the World, regularly drew between fifteen and forty people. Two key figures at Lakeside were Alistair, a retired minister who led many of the adult education courses, and Nathan, Lakeside's senior pastor during much of my research.

Common Ground is a thirty-year-old adult education center located in four branches in and around a large U.S. city. Common Ground describes itself as "a study center whose primary focus is on the major religious, philosophical, spiritual, and cultural traditions and their implications." Common Ground is an educational nonprofit organization, unaffiliated with any church, that sponsors year-round adult education classes with titles like The Century's Top Five Religious Books, Interdependence: The Heart of Buddhist Philosophy, Biblical Portraits: The Matriarchs, and An Evening with Socrates. Courses typically draw about thirty people, and class leaders typically are scholars in fields such as religious studies, philosophy, history, psychology, mythology, or astronomy; many are professional religious workers such as nuns, monks, or rabbis; some are artists or musicians. The organization itself was the brainchild of Chris, a professor of religious studies, and Dennis, an interfaith activist.

Recent years have seen a multitude of new books on spirituality and meaning; I recorded radio interviews and attended public lectures given by such authors, sometimes in the course of promotional book tours, and sometimes as invited speakers. Finally, some of my research focused on an urban organization involved in the Spirituality at Work movement. Through this organization's sponsorship, businesspeople participated in discussions and workshops on topics such as "Finding Your Calling" and "Bringing Your Soul to Work."

People in each of these settings shared one important demographic characteristic: a high level of education. Although I could not vouch for the people in attendance at public lectures, it was clear that most of the people I was observing were college educated, and some—particularly those in leadership roles—had advanced degrees. This apparent association between reflexive spirituality and education is striking. Conventionally, scholars associate educational attainment with declining religiosity; the logic, derived ultimately from Max Weber, is that the critical thought so prized in higher education results in the deconstruction and delegitimation of traditional religious claims.[3] According to this logic, the modern Americans I observed should have demonstrated a highly rationalized secularism, rejecting religion in favor of scientific rationality. Instead, they developed a sophisticated critique of the broad literalism that informs both religious fundamentalism and scientific reductionism, coupled with exploration of equally sophisticated alternatives. The pages that follow will examine both those critiques and the alternatives.

The Critique of Literalism

In my observations, reflexive spiritualists' critique of literalism was most prevalent in religious settings, and there it most often took the form of criticizing literalistic interpretations of the Bible. At Lakeside Church, for instance, Pastor Nathan used sermons to encourage church members to look beyond literal readings of scripture for deeper meanings. As he said one Sunday morning:

> The heart of being a Christian is an event—Jesus' life—and that event's impact, meaning for you and me, and that's interpretation, not description. The Gospels are not so much descriptive as they are interpretive. If I had had the time and resources for this sermon, I would have brought up various artists' paintings of Jesus—we'd see they'd all be different. In some Jesus would be a blond Scandinavian, in some he would be an Irish shepherd, in some he would have Oriental features, in some he would appear as a Middle Eastern peasant. They would all be different. Having seen that, I hope you wouldn't ask, "So which one is real, what did Jesus really look like?" Because to

> ask that question is to miss the reason why the artist painted the picture, which was to say, "This is the impact Jesus had on me." The artist wasn't trying to say, "Here's what Jesus looked like," it wasn't a photographic attempt. The artist was saying, "In him I find the fullness of my humanity, and I learn more about God. I want to show you this so that you might find that too." . . . So too with the Gospels. The Gospels are not a literal history. They are an interpretation of the meaning of Jesus for the gospel-writers. They were written for religious instruction, not for historical description. The Gospels have an agenda. John is up front about it: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." The Creeds are saying, "This is what he means to me," and that ends with the question, "What does he mean to you?" The Creeds are interpretations.

Nathan argues that neither Jesus' physical appearance nor scriptural text nor church creeds are to be taken literally. Faith here is about interpretation and meaning, not photography and history.

Similarly, during one Lakeside adult education class, the group discussed Karen Armstrong's book *The Battle for God*. In the course of the discussion, group members criticized interpretations of biblical stories that treated them as factual descriptions of history. They argued that such stories are better understood as attempts to use the language of mythology to describe internal religious experiences. Bill, who had read the book and was leading the discussion, thought mythological thinking was more powerful than literal thinking and elicited sympathetic commentary from others in the group:

> *Bill*: She [Armstrong] says we have not been able to express the experience of the sacred in logical discursive terms, but instead have had recourse to mythology, which was never meant to describe history, but rather was an attempt to express internal events. Nonhistorical does not mean untrue. The dearth of myth has led to us having to discover psychoanalysis. Freud. She says reason represents the outermost rind of the mind. When I read that, I could see an orange, and you peel the rind.
>
> *Angie*: The good stuff 's all inside.
>
> *Bill*: She says the fundamentalists have missed mythos as well, they have turned it into logos. Rational philosophy, that's when the literal reading of the Bible began.
>
> *Helen*: Genesis began this many years and days ago, this literalism.
>
> *Bill*: The reaction to the theory of evolution has been, "We'll prove creation actually happened literally as it says." The bodily resurrection,

> resurrection doesn't have to mean the body is resuscitated. The trinity is a mythical expression, an attempt to describe the undescribable, not an attempt to prove God has three parts.
>
> *Jess*: The logos-oriented tried to put it down as a formula, and that makes it unbelievable.

In this excerpt, the group explicitly rejects the literalistic assumption that "nonhistorical" is synonymous with "untrue." They reject the language of history as a good way of understanding the Bible, and instead promote the language of mythology as truer to the transcendent reality that the biblical writers were trying to convey.

While biblical literalism may be the most obvious kind, people I observed outside specifically Christian settings found other literalisms equally limiting. Rather than talking about religious creeds or scriptures, people in other settings critiqued a broad cultural trend toward closing off meaning. During a Common Ground weekend retreat, for example, Dennis spoke about the idea of magic "properly understood," contrasting that with what he called "fundamentalist" notions of magic:

> There's the holistic, community way of deeper understanding and enriching life, and the fundamentalist way. The fundamentalist way is to say, "We have the wrong rock" or "Today's Thursday, it should be amethyst." Aromatherapy is an egregious example of assertion rather than teaching. Some cultures do this in a context, it's a "Let's explore the possibilities together." We live in a culture where assertion of one-to-one correspondence is all over. In Freudian dream interpretation books, you look up a symbol and it says, "That means this." Jungian dream interpretation books are different. Jung says to understand a dream you have to "play the myth onward."

At another Common Ground event, Peter spoke of the spiritual richness of nature. He said, "Ancient people look at a river and ask what does it mean. Modern people have no idea it means anything; we've lost our capacity to ask."

In all these examples, people are criticizing strictly literal interpretations of objects and events in the world—the Bible, dreams, rivers—as too simplistic, as concerned only with simple surface correspondences, as focusing on simple denotation. What excessive literalism obscures, in their eyes, is the possibility of *connotation*; the symbolic value of the objects, events, and stories of human life; the potential of these objects, events, and stories to reveal deeper, more profound meanings. To look at the world literally—to see only apparent, surface meanings—is to miss most of the story; by its very nature, transcendent meaning lies beyond the simple surface correlations that Dennis calls "one-to-one correspondences."

In rejecting literalistic approaches to religion and the world, reflexive spiritualists are also challenging the cultural construction of necessary conflict between science and religion. They point out that this assumption of conflict rests on the deeper assumption that religion's veracity depends on its literal accuracy. This critique applies not only to religious literalists but also to sociology. The "science versus religion" trope that pervades American culture is echoed by sociological theories of religious modernity that portray religion as necessarily undermined by scientific rationality. This construction appears in the work of theorists of modernity such as Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas, as well as theorists in the sociology of religion such as Peter Berger.[4] All these theorists are drawing on the original work of Max Weber, who argued that scientific rationality undermines religion by bringing doctrine into conflict with science and by making it impossible to maintain an unquestioning adherence to the total authority of religious tradition (Weber [1919] 1946; [1956] 1978).

Weber's terms make it difficult to understand reflexive spirituality's simultaneous embrace of both scientific rationality and religious meaning. Instead, we must turn toward the work of another group of scholars: theorists in the sociology of religion for whom doctrine and traditionalism are not the defining features of religion in society. Robert Bellah, for example, stressed the significance of what he called "symbolic consciousness," arguing that "symbolic consciousness is a way of outflanking literalism" (1970, 232). Andrew Greeley (1995) has argued similarly that religion constitutes attempts to express through metaphor and poetry ineffable experiences of renewal. Robert Wuthnow has observed that the modern spirituality movement "concentrates on that mixture of spiritual and rational . . . whereby the person in modern societies seeks meaning in life" (1998, 5). For these scholars, the strength of religion in modern society is measured not by the plausibility of its doctrine but rather by its purchase on transcendent meaning. Symbolic sophistication and resonance are what make religion meaningful, not literal accuracy or intellectual monopoly. In these terms, the conflicts between science and religion, scientific rationality and religious meaning, take new form. The question becomes not whether modern people believe in the scientific accuracy of religious stories but whether they have the skills to read religious stories in ways more productive of meaning than scientific rationality can be. This is the question that concerns people who practice reflexive spirituality, and the focus of their second critique of modern culture.

The Critique of Epistemological Materialism

Reflexive spiritualists see modern society as emphasizing only information that can be gathered via the five senses, trusting physical and material realities at the expense of spiritual ones. This overemphasis limits the possibilities for meanings that lie beyond what the senses can grasp.

Within religious groups, for instance, rejection of biblical literalism did not mean a rejection of spiritual possibilities in favor of scientific explanations. For example, during the Lenten season, Lakeside Church hosted Wednesday night discussions featuring a video series called "Jesus: The New Way," one segment of which discussed the historical verifiability of the resurrection of Jesus. Shortly before this Wednesday, Pastor Nathan had given sermons in which he criticized approaches to Christianity that emphasized historical rather than symbolic truth. Since this was early in my research at Lakeside, I wondered if Nathan's perspective was shared by others in the church, and so during the discussion after the video, I asked a question:

> *Kelly*: I was thinking about the sermons of the last couple weeks, and Nathan saying that to ask what really happened was to ask the wrong question. How does that jive with this?
>
> *Ellen*: I think Nathan's sermons and this video are both running into the same phenomenon, which is our twentieth-century scientific mind-set, where we consider truth to be what we can observe with our senses, and nothing else can be truth. So Nathan is saying to ask what really happened historically is to ask the wrong question, and I agree with that, but this video is saying if we're gonna do that, let's at least look at the history and the context and see what we can and can't know. So they're coming at the same thing from two different angles.

Ellen's argument is that it is necessary to differentiate what can be known "scientifically"—that is, through the epistemological materialism of scientific history—from what must be understood metaphorically. Scientific history has its value, from Ellen's perspective, but it does not have what it takes to get at transcendent truths, and so necessarily limits the possibilities for valid transcendent meanings.

Similar concerns could be heard in less explicitly religious settings. At an event in the wake of the Columbine tragedy of 1999, Common Grounders began to discuss mass violence and the people who commit mass violence. When one participant brought up the possibility that chemical imbalances lead to violent behavior, others were quick to bring up the limitations of approaching this problem with scientific reductionism:

> *Evan*: What about brain research? There are all these physiological things that affect people . . .
>
> *Chris*: I think of it like a circle, and you can enter the circle at different places. Sometimes a chemical is an avenue, but I don't think chemical treatment by itself is a solution.
>
> *Teresa*: Chemical treatment might stop a person's more violent impulses, but it won't solve the violence in society.

> *Dennis*: We're such a scientistic culture. We take science so seriously, we imagine that it's the final answer. . . . I think there's a huge mistake in the scientistic view that once an organic component has been identified, the cause has been found. . . . There is an organic aspect, but it's a complex.

For Dennis, the empirical methods of biological science reveal one part of reality, but to rely on their findings exclusively is to miss most of the complexity of actual reality.

At a different Common Ground event, Peter made a similar comment: "What we're seeing now is a slow breakdown of the hold science had on culture. People no longer see science as the only way to know. Soon we'll see a congeniality developing. . . . rather than naive realism, material reductionism, it's all just objective." Ellen's, Dennis's, and Peter's references to "science" and the "scientific mind-set" do not represent a hostility to the scientific enterprise itself; rather, these are rejections of what religious historian Huston Smith (2001) has called *scientism*—a cultural condition in which the methods of science are seen as the *only* legitimate route to truth. From the perspective of reflexive spirituality, the cultural pattern of scientism inhibits the possibilities for meaning and wisdom in modern society, and so must be modulated.

The cultural conflict between religious meaning and scientific rationality depends not only on a literalistic approach to religion but also on this broader literalism that Smith has called *scientism* and I have called *epistemological materialism*. As the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has noted, this broad literalism has created "the prejudice that reality is only what is manipulatable" (1991, 452), a prejudice that disables the possibility of transcendent truths. He asks that we "preserv[e] . . . beside technological language, which disposes, the language which awakens possibilities" (1978, 231). People who practice reflexive spirituality ask for the same thing; they embrace scientific thinking as far as it goes, but they want to place it in a context alongside other systems of thought that offer more resources for the construction of meaning. The conflict, then, is not so much between science and religion as it is between scientism and the capacity for meaning.

The Critique of Closure

Modern culture, in the eyes of reflexive spiritualists, fosters a preoccupation with answers, with facts, with the already known and the unshakably certain. A society that depends too much on this orientation toward ends produces minds that cannot stay open long enough to fully inquire into the mysteries,

complexities, and possibilities of the transcendent. In this way, a preoccupation with closure ends up forestalling the possibilities for transcendent meaning.[5]

In religious settings, this critique of closure often took the form of a critique of fundamentalist Christianity. Lakesiders often associated fundamentalism with a fixation on religious *answers*, describing themselves, by contrast, as more interested in opening up religious *questions*. Both inside and outside religious settings, the critique of closure represented a conviction that greater possibilities for meaning come from living with more questions and fewer answers. Here, for example, is Common Ground's Dennis, discussing the Taoist document the *I Ching*: "The way to phrase questions to the *I Ching* isn't "Should I do this? Yes or No?" It's "I'm deeply concerned about this." If a person goes to the *I Ching* looking for an answer, they'll find it frustrating. If a person goes to the *I Ching* looking for a new way to think about a question, they'll find it intriguing." Similarly, in a public radio interview, author Donah Zohar described promoting questions over answers to people in business:

> We as a culture tend to prefer answers to questions. . . . A lot of my life is spent lecturing to big corporations about their intelligence and their thinking processes, and there too I say, you know, you're far too answer-oriented, you stress what's known, what's certain, what's predictable. Go for the uncertainty, go for the questions, go for what you don't know. And that opens the brain up and opens the intelligence up. . . . The great rabbi Abraham Heschel, one of the great Jewish mystics of the twentieth century, said we're closer to God when we're asking questions than when we think we know the answers.

As these comments suggest, reflexive spiritualists criticize modern American culture—in both the religious sphere and secular society—for overemphasizing answers and so attenuating the possibilities for meaningfulness.

Reflexive spirituality's critique of closure applies as well to some of our sociological theorizing about religion. Religious pluralism and the uncertainty that it brings are sometimes seen as both causes for and evidence of religion's weakness in modern society. Peter Berger's (1967) influential early work, for example, portrayed religion as a unified "sacred canopy" that provides adherents with an unshakeable worldview; the advent of modernity shook up that worldview and so necessarily threatened religious vitality. Anthony Giddens has theorized that we are in a state of "reflexive modernity," which "insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned" (1991, 3). Giddens, however, specifically excludes religion from his theory, arguing that "religion and tradition were always closely linked, and the latter is even more thoroughly undermined than the former by

the reflexivity of modern social life, which stands in direct opposition to it" (1990, 109).

In reflexive spirituality, we see people who bring a rational-critical reflexivity to their pursuit of spiritual wisdom. The existence of reflexive spirituality, in which both spirituality and ongoing revision are taken seriously, calls into question the assumption that religious "strength" can be evaluated by measuring the certainty with which adherents subscribe to particular beliefs. It suggests, instead, that religion is an active participant in the reflexive project of modernity.

Resources in the Fight against Literalism: There's More There Than Meets the Eye

Reflexive spiritualists engage in a broad-ranging critique of modern culture, but it is not a critique without a vision of alternative ways to understand the world. In contrast to closure and literalism, they propose metaphorical thinking; and alongside scientifically derived solutions, they seek mystical wisdom.

Metaphor

The primary resource reflexive spiritualists deploy for making meaning in the face of literalism is a metaphorical consciousness. Across settings, secular and religious, metaphors were promoted as a gateway to greater wisdom. In an interview with author Vincent Crapanzano, public radio host Jean Feraca said, "We should teach poetry. . . . The ability to make metaphors, after all, is the best antidote to literalism." At a workshop for business workers, leader Gregg Levoy said, "To me, part of the key is *looking* for meaning. . . . Physical symptoms . . . For example if you have a stiff neck constantly. In addition to treating the symptoms, in addition to treating the symptoms, ask the metaphoric questions. Is there a way in which I feel rigid in my life?" And at Lakeside Church, a man named Jerry told his Sunday school class:

> The purpose of good fiction—good fiction, *War and Peace*, *Gone with the Wind*, not supermarket checkout fiction—is to tell the truth. *War and Peace* reveals truths about human nature. I can go ahead and call the Bible fiction, but the purpose of fiction is to tell the truth, and the Bible has great insight into truth, and I can understand it better that way.

Alongside his critique of literalism, then, Jerry advocates a metaphorical approach to the Bible, an approach he finds more productive of insight and deep meaning.

Mysticism

Reflexive spiritualists also promoted direct experience of the transcendent and emphasized meanings associated with the mystical traditions of assorted religions. The insights of mystics, the practice of contemplation and meditation, and the experience of the transcendent all appeared as sources of deeper meaning in modern life. At Lakeside Church, discussion of mystical experience was sometimes associated with the idea of the Holy Spirit. For example, Nathan said in a sermon,

> In talking about the Holy Spirit, the church doesn't begin with a definition, it begins with an experience, the experience of Pentecost. . . . Through the Holy Spirit the routine becomes exciting, the powerless becomes powerful, the Holy Spirit brings to life and existence a dynamism. . . . We must be open to change. . . . But if we are open, we'll experience life as we have never experienced it before.

Outside specifically Christian settings, mysticism was described more broadly. The Spirituality at Work movement, for example, often spoke of "practices that keep you in touch with your source." And the folks at Common Ground spoke of mysticism as the core of all religious traditions, as Peter did during a class specifically about mysticism: "At the core of all religious traditions is a mystical experience, an experience of unity, of oneness, with the divine. And all of us, all people, are meant for that experience. . . . It's not a question of faith. It's a question of experience." Mystical experience is direct experience of a nonliteral world, direct experience of there being "more than meets the eye." Because of this, it serves as another resource for the cultivation of transcendent meaning in the face of a literalistic society.

Pluralism

As is probably clear by now, reflexive spiritualists embrace religious and epistemological pluralism. They cultivate interest in and acceptance of a wide variety of religious and secular traditions. This openness to a variety of traditions aids their fight against literalism and their promotion of meaningfulness by increasing their repertoire of metaphors, meanings, practices, and insights. As Dan said at a Lakeside Sunday school class, "What I hate is when people hold up a Bible and say 'It's all right here.' I look and I don't find it all there. I like to think it's an open book and it's in other places together with there." Common Ground's Phil used symbols from Hinduism and Christianity together to enhance the metaphorical potential of each, saying, "I like the idea of purgatory because I see it as parallel to reincarnation—both acknowledge the ongoingness of life, in which a kind of cleansing takes place." Their pluralistic approach maximizes reflexive spiritualists' sources of potentially meaningful symbols, stories, ideas, and practices.

Social Institutions and Reflexive Spirituality as a Cultural Movement

Reflexive spirituality is not only a personal search for religious meaning but also a systematic cultural critique. Reflexive spiritualists aim to draw attention to cultural patterns—patterns I have collected under the broad heading of "literalism"—that they see as threatening both to the individual quest to live a meaningful life and to the possibility of a social system informed by wisdom, reflection, and meaning. Reflexive spiritualists criticize these patterns in the hope of attenuating their meaning-inhibiting power, and they promote alternative approaches to life and to religion that are potentially more productive of wisdom, reflection, and meaning. Reflexive spiritualists, then, are engaged in a struggle against literalism both inside and outside of religious institutions, in an effort to expand the possibilities for meaning and wisdom in modern American society.

What would it take for this critique of literalism to have consequences not just for the individuals who practice reflexive spirituality but for the broader society? One asset for a growing cultural movement is the possession of sustaining social institutions. Although this chapter cannot offer a full analysis of reflexive spirituality's cultural power, I do want to comment on reflexive spirituality's social location and institutional resources.

For the nascent culture of reflexive spirituality to become a socially powerful movement, it must develop sustaining social institutions, places where its ideas and practices are generated, developed, and shared. One primary institutional incubator for reflexive spirituality is the discipline of religious studies. During my research, I heard references to books in religious studies scattered throughout reflexive spiritualists' comments, but more central than the books themselves was the particular approach to religion that religious studies encourages.[6] The discipline of religious studies promotes a comparative approach to religion that assumes all religions are valid systems of meaning for their respective communities; it brackets questions of "which religion is the best" and encourages understanding of religious questions and religious symbolism. Since its founding in 1964, the American Academy of Religion has grown to 9,000 members who teach courses in virtually every college and university in the United States (and much of the world). Religious studies scholars provide a professional cadre that can generate considerable intellectual resources for the use of reflexive spiritualists.

More broadly, institutions of higher education in general offer indirect cultural support to reflexive spirituality. Their programs in the humanities promote systematic reflection on texts, metaphorical consciousness, and pluralistic sensibility. At the same time, however, such institutions also serve as carriers

of the epistemological materialism that reflexive spirituality rejects. They are often sites for both creativity and conflict.

Reflexive spirituality finds some institutional support in the popular book industry, with its increasing attention to spirituality and religion. Collectively, online and store sales for Barnes and Noble, Inc., and Borders Group totaled more than $8 billion in 2004; *Publisher's Weekly* estimates that books about religion make up 9.3 percent of the market share of all adult trade books. At the time of this writing, Amazon.com's top 200 best-selling books included, among other titles, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; The Five People You Meet in Heaven; The Power of Belief: Essential Tools for an Extraordinary Life; Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality; Man's Search for Meaning;* and *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It.*[7]

Both academic institutions and popular publishing are intertwined with the activities promoted by some churches. Books and speakers find their way into programs offered especially by large urban churches. Such churches sometimes house active adult education programs that provide spaces for discussion and collective engagement with religious meanings and secular society. Churches, then, are another source of institutional support for the culture of reflexive spirituality.

Reflexive spirituality is also enabled by institutions in the broader public sphere: the public lecture circuit, public radio and television, specialized organizations like Common Ground and those associated with the Spirituality at Work movement, and, in general, any space in which people can come together to talk in a rational and open-ended way about religious meanings.

Finally, although reflexive spirituality is neither purely individualistic nor unique to Protestantism, it does draw support from the intertwining American cultural traditions of individualism and (liberal) Protestantism. Suspicion of institutional authority and promotion of individual experience run deep in American culture. From colonial deists to transcendentalists and revivalists, individual reflection and discernment have often been emphasized as ultimately authoritative.

In the end, though, what stands out about reflexive spirituality is a relative lack of institutional elaboration. None of the institutions named here are specifically institutions of and for reflexive spirituality. On the contrary, most of these institutions are what Victor Turner might call "liminoid"—spaces in the margins, "betwixt and between" dominant institutions. Some of these institutions (e.g., the institutions of the public sphere and the popular book industry) are specifically oriented to the creation of culture rather than the establishment of culture. These institutions are designed to stay "in between" the dominant institutions of social life, and so represent more of a foothold for reflexive spirituality than a stable platform. Religious studies, as an academic discipline, is

an unwitting accomplice. It has its own scholarly imperatives, some of which support deep skepticism toward religious meaning and experience. In any case, the fight against a culture of literalism and the promotion of transcendent meaning are not its primary goal. Churches are as much battleground as launching pad for reflexive spirituality. They house a variety of religious perspectives, including many that embrace literalism. Even those that do adopt reflexive spirituality as one of their languages of power often relegate it to the margins, away from official doctrine and away from the pulpit.

Reflexive spirituality's lack of institutional establishment corresponds to a similar lack of collective identity. "Reflexive spirituality" is an academic label, drawn from sociological theory, not from the field. The people I call "reflexive spiritualists" have no name for themselves. Once, in a United Church of Christ church after the period of my study, I heard a minister use the phrase "reflective Christians" in connection with this approach to religious tradition, but otherwise I most frequently heard reflexive spiritualists identify themselves only negatively, as "not fundamentalist."

To truly develop into a cultural movement, reflexive spiritualists need a collective identity based on something they want to identify with, not something they reject. To sustain such a collective identity, they need institutions of their own and networks tying those institutions together. At least some wish they had something comparable to the network created by self-identified evangelical Protestants. As Common Ground leader Dennis said during the period of my fieldwork, "Conservative religious people have mastered the airwaves and the mass media. Liberal religious people don't even have stationery." An organized network would enable reflexive spiritualists to elaborate their critique of literalistic religion and literalistic secularity, to promote their own method of meaning making, and to act collectively in the wider society.

Literalism and Meaning in Modern Society

In spite of the absence of an organized social movement, reflexive spirituality is a social reality with a cogent cultural critique. Defying theoretical expectations, these modern people embrace science and religion, rationality and spirituality, in an effort to cultivate a more meaningful modern society. Rather than finding pluralism threatening to their faith, they take advantage of its potential to enhance the meaningfulness of modern life. They promote mysticism not as a rejection of or escape from modern rationality but as a critical complement to it. They reject both the narrow literalism that measures religious truth in terms of scientific accuracy and the broader literalism that confines truth to the certainty of scientific fact. They find not weakness but power in uncertainty, and they cultivate an open-ended, reflexive approach to the pursuit of wisdom that neither blindly succumbs to tradition nor leaves it behind.

In the face of reflexive spirituality, some of the dichotomies that have long informed the sociology of religion become less compelling. There is no necessary conflict between science and religion, or between the broader scientific rationality of modern secular life and the meaning-providing traditions of religious life. There is no necessary conflict between religious uncertainty and religious strength, or between religious pluralism and religious meaningfulness. Instead, the case of reflexive spirituality asks us to consider the limitations placed on meaning by a broad cultural literalism that dominates our relationships to and understanding of the traditions of both religious and secular life.

NOTES

1. Source: http://www.oneplace.com/Ministries/Bible_Answer_Man/Article.asp?article_id=276.

2. The debate, at Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago, was videotaped and was issued in 1994 by Zondervan as *Atheism vs Christianity: Where Does the Evidence Point?*.

3. See, for example, Weber (1946 [1919]; 1978 [1956]) and Berger (1967).

4. See, for example, Giddens (1990, 1991), Habermas ([1981] 1984; [1981] 1987), and Berger (1967).

5. As Ammerman notes in her introduction to this volume, this critique resonates with Weber's notion of the "iron cage" that results from the unrestrained institutionalization of systems of means/ends rationality.

6. See Porterfield (2001) for a supporting discussion of the role of religious studies in contemporary American spirituality.

7. Sources: www.bordersgroupinc.com, www.barnesandnobleinc.com, www.publishersweekly.com, and www.amazon.com.

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II

Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance

Meredith McGuire

What do people's bodies have to do with their religious and spiritual lives? Are spirituality and bodily materiality dichotomous, in tidy binary opposition, as Western categories of thought have suggested in recent centuries? According to many Western religious teachings, individuals who wanted to enhance their spiritual lives would have to overcome the burden of their materiality, deny their material urges and concerns, and transcend the limitations (and even the pollution) of the material body.[1] This chapter argues, to the contrary, that if we want to understand the full range of religion as practiced and experienced by ordinary people in the context of their everyday lives, we need to be aware of how people's religious and spiritual expressions engage their material bodies and address their material concerns (McGuire 1990, 2003c).

Religion, in this broad sense, is about how people make sense of their world—the "stories" out of which they live. We need to take seriously not merely the packages of religious narratives supplied by institutions but—more important—*the myriad individual ways by which ordinary people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the "stories" out of which they live*. In contrast to religion-as-preached (whether one promoted by a religious institution or one "preached" by a spokesperson for one of the many "spiritual" alternatives), each individual's religion-as-lived is *constituted* by these often-mundane practices for remembering, sharing, and creatively assembling their most vital religious narratives (Orsi 1997). Human bodies matter because those practices—even interior ones, such as contemplation—involve people's bodies, as well as their minds and spirits. Thus, I use the concept of

"embodied practices" to emphasize those ritual and expressive activities in which spiritual meanings and understandings are embedded in and accomplished through the body (e.g., bodily senses, postures, gestures, and movements).

Breathing is the epitome of an embodied practice (Lyon 1994; Mauss [1934] 1973). Although all living persons must breathe, and do so autonomically, our breathing patterns can be profoundly affected by our social, psychological, and religious practices. Pranayama yoga, for instance, is a physical and spiritual discipline that uses control of the breath to effect other changes in the mind/body/spirit as a whole. One pranayama practice involves regular rhythmic, slow breathing through alternate nostrils, and practitioners hold that it literally *accomplishes* physical, emotional, spiritual, and social balance. Pranayama yoga is important for our understanding of embodied practices, not merely because many Westerners have successfully tried this culturally "foreign" practice but because it illustrates how the holistic engagement of our minds, bodies, and spirits in something so seemingly simple and basic as breathing could be understood as a religious practice.

Although an increasing number of religious groups are actively promoting such embodied practices, a vast array of everyday embodied practice is more improvised than institutionally organized. Too often, scholars of religion have noticed only those embodied practices that are done in a "properly religious" institutional setting such as a church or synagogue. This conception of religion is too narrow. It prevents us from noticing and understanding the myriad other practices by which people live their religions. Furthermore, such a limited conception obstructs our appreciation of how central our material bodies are in the core practice and experience of religion. What might we see differently if we considered also the ordinary, everyday embodied practices by which individuals (sometimes privately, sometimes collectively) accomplish their spiritual lives and, literally, live their religions?

The Historical Marginalization of Embodied Practice

Unfortunately, most scholars of religion are limited by an overly institutional conception of religion. I have argued elsewhere (McGuire 2003a) that we need to realize that our definitional starting points (including key concepts like "religion" and "sacred/profane") are themselves, *social constructions*. Definitional boundaries around these concepts were hotly contested throughout much of Western history, especially during what some historians call the "long Reformation" (roughly 1300 to 1700 C.E.). During that period, ongoing reform movements among both Catholics and Protestants in Europe and the Americas established much of what we have come to recognize as "religion" today (Muir 1997, 6). Thus, the contested social constructions that define "religion" are themselves amenable to sociological analysis.

One outcome of the "long Reformation" era's struggles over definitional boundaries in Western societies was a strong negative evaluation of most people's everyday religious practices—especially those that involved their bodies and their emotions. Such embodied practices were important because they were the means by which people had linked the spiritual realm with their pragmatic, quotidian needs—such as healing, fertility, protection from adverse fortune, and obtaining desired material goods. After the definitional boundaries around religion were recast, the dominant religious groups in Europe and the Americas came to privilege belief over practice. This definitional bias is now so taken for granted that people commonly refer to religions as "creeds" or "faiths."[2]

The same boundary contests over what could be defined as "religious" resulted in the denigration of the important practices by which many (perhaps, most) people literally "embodied" their religious expression and experience. These practices came to be disparaged—as marginal (e.g., as "folk" or "popular" religious practices), as impure (e.g., as "superstitious" or overly sensuous practices), or as downright dangerous (e.g., labeled as "magical" or "pagan" practices). In the context of increasingly dualistic ideas about the gulf between human minds/spirits and their bodies, practices addressing human bodies (e.g., for childbirth, healing, or fertility) were particularly suspect. Historian Edward Muir argues that a key feature distinguishing medieval from modern sensibility is how corporality was linked with ritual practice. He writes, "It may now be difficult for most educated, secularized Westerners who live in the aftermath of the great sexual repression and bodily oblivion of the modern age to appreciate fully how Christian Europeans once readily thought in bodily images and habitually juxtaposed sacred and profane bodies" (Muir 1997, 149).

For centuries, subsequently, Western religious authorities have attempted to control adherents' religious practices, especially those addressing the human body, but with less than complete success. People have consistently resisted such control, selecting, borrowing, adapting, creating, and blending diverse cultural elements into their own religious practices. Thus, embodied religious practice is often an important site of contested authority, dominance, and resistance.[3]

Nevertheless, *all* religions engage individuals through concrete practices that involve bodies, as well as minds and spirits. We readily recognize those bodily practices as religious when we think of, for example, Native American religious experience (see, e.g., Spickard 1991). In that cultural context, intense bodily involvement in practices of drumming, dancing, vision quests, smoking, feasting, sweating, and chanting is completely consistent with a high level of spiritual development. This stands in stark contrast to the typical picture of spiritual development among Europeans or Euro-Americans, whose highest levels of achievement are peculiarly disembodied, often purely cognitive and unemotional.

Like the Native American, however, Euro-Americans and Europeans do use their bodies in religious practice. They also experience certain body practices (e.g., postures, movements, ways of focusing attention) as more conducive to

spiritual experiences than others. Certain visual images, sounds, and smells similarly heighten spiritual focus and evoke meaningful religious experiences. And concrete physical practices, such as a warm embrace or holding hands around a dinner table, promote a sense of connection with a community of others, tangibly evoking shared collective memories and experiences. Perhaps it is a modern conceit to think that our religious practices are more "civilized" because they are less linked with human bodies than were premodern practices. But there is no reason to believe that modern people ceased experiencing the world through their bodies. Students of modern religion would do well to attend to the way religion speaks not only to the cognitive aspect of adherents' lives (i.e., their beliefs and thoughts) but also to their emotional needs and their everyday experiences as whole, embodied persons.

Human *embodiment*—the quality of having and being intimately identified with our human bodies—is a basic part of our humanity. Thus, all religions deal with embodiment in some way, as they address human concerns about bodily health, suffering, birth, and death. In principle, Christian religions should be particularly attentive to human embodiment, because of the theological centrality of Christ's incarnation and, thus, Christ's humanity. That theological theme—important in much late medieval spirituality (see Bynum 1986)—has waned, however. Many Christian churches today are uncomfortable with any practice that treats bodies as anything but profane. Theological traditions, then, may encompass multiple and contradictory teachings about the body, so teachings themselves are far from a satisfactory guide to how adherents actually make connections between body and spirit.

Both religious authorities and secular sophisticates may denigrate any link between spirituality and human material concerns, but that link has not gone away. Bodily sickness and pain, childbearing and fertility concerns, the need for adequate food, shelter, and protection from adversity—these are the matters that dominate everyday prayers, even as they are condemned as somehow less appropriate matters for religious attention than so-called purely spiritual concerns. For example, why did my audience laugh when I read them some of the ex-votos from a popular religious shrine in south Texas: "Thanks for your help in obtaining my truck driver's license," ". . . for my daughter's rapid recovery from surgery," ". . . for the washing machine a neighbor left behind when she moved," and so on? Is it because we consider these material concerns less worthy than some "purely spiritual" requests? Students of religion simply cannot afford to make such judgments.

Noticing Embodied Practices in Everyday Settings

What would sociologists of religion notice or understand differently if we were to reexamine contemporary religious expressions with an eye to embodied

practices? What would we see if we looked for people's mundane ritual practices and other everyday expressions of their lived religions, rather than simply for indicators of institutional religiosity? Specifically, how might we comprehend embodied practices in today's patterns of spirituality?

Interestingly, most scholars who have given serious attention to embodied practices in their research on religion have noticed them particularly in the spiritual lives of people who were going beyond the boundaries of ordinary institutional religiosity. For example, Robert Wuthnow's (2001) interviews with artists—potters, dancers, musicians, sculptors, and so on—produced many compelling examples of people whose spiritual lives were thoroughly intermeshed with their artistic discipline. Their mind/body/spirit focus and creative processes were accomplished through deeply embodied practices. Such autonomous and independent creative spirituality is, however, distrusted by many religious leaders who are unable to exercise any institutional evaluative control over it (Wuthnow 2003, 236ff.). The practices through which creativity is developed, focused, and expressed are, thus, nearly always forms of resistance to control by authorities (religious and political).

Other examples of resistance expressed in embodied practices come from studies of "feminist" spirituality (see Northrup 1997; Winter, Lummis, and Stokes 1994). Those who consciously choose to create "feminist" ritual practices do so in opposition—opposition to other patterns of spirituality that have dominated their society and their own religious upbringing. Thus, they often engage in embodied practices that ritually transform or sacralize aspects of women's everyday lives that are disvalued or denigrated in the dominant religious practices. For instance, women's spirituality is particularly likely to sacralize domestic space and seemingly profane time, including the physical seasons of a woman's life.

Both feminist and other forms of women's spiritual practice are more likely to take bodily expression than are institutionally approved religious practices. Noting commonalities among women's ritual practices in Christian, Jewish, neo-pagan, feminist, and traditional contexts, Lesley Northrup suggests that sacred space is "a space [modern ritualizing women] inhabit comfortably, bodily. Women use embodied rituals that establish horizontal relationship (hugging, hand-holding, touching for healing) and that require sideways movement (dancing, swaying, changing postures). . . . [Such movement] helps maintain the pervasive mood of spontaneity, openness, social awareness, and flexibility that are characteristic of women's ritualizing" (1997, 61). Similarly, women who have consciously chosen nonmedicalized approaches to childbirth, healing, and aging frequently describe those embodied practices as part of their spirituality.[4] In both everyday spaces and set-aside ritual spaces, women often link body and spirit.

Many religious social activists also engage in embodied practices that serve to express and support their efforts for social change. For example, James Spickard's studies of U.S. Catholic social activists identified several specific practices created

or adapted by activist communities. For members of a Catholic Worker community, the concrete practice of "doing soup" (i.e., transporting and serving soup to street people) is an integral part of their house Mass and communion supper (of soup) that precede it (Spickard 2005). Although their activist resistance is mainly toward the larger society and its injustices and violence, their practice also expresses resistance toward their church. Many of the persons Spickard interviewed considered themselves good Catholics, but in opposition to the church hierarchy's authoritarian practices. One woman, who worked in a peace-and-justice center, explained:

> What we do when we pray together is the same model that we do [for] everything else. We pray together collaboratively. We have experience, we reflect on it socially, . . . and on most days we are given to do an action around that. . . . I haven't been to Mass in a long time. There's a longing in me . . . the memory of how good it felt to have the sensuousness of church. But then I get very angered, because I immediately remember . . . male homilies that had absolutely nothing to do with experience. . . . [So] I choose to pray with women. And I choose to pray collaboratively. I choose to pray toward action. That's how my community's set up. (quoted in McGuire and Spickard 2003, 146)

Popular religious practices, especially those of women, immigrants, and other marginalized people, provide yet more examples of embodied practices in everyday lived religion. The intensely physical rituals of a Haitian vodou family in Brooklyn address deeply felt everyday concerns (Brown 1991). First- and second-generation immigrant women in the twentieth century expressed their everyday physical and emotional despair in devotions to Saint Jude (Orsi 1996). More recent immigrants, Miami Cubans, intertwine physical and spiritual elements of Santería with Catholic devotions at the shrine of the Cuban patron saint, Our Lady of Charity (Tweed 1997).

Robert Orsi reminds us that popular religious practices are ways by which the sacred regularly touches the quotidian worlds of work and home (see especially Orsi 1997, 2005). Once attuned to such embodied practices, however, Orsi was able to notice similar practices in church-approved instruction, as well. In the era prior to Vatican II, Catholic teachers (typically nuns) and parents consciously taught children habits that, he suggests, literally became embodied, shaping children's experience of their material and spiritual worlds, thus sacralizing and making those religious worlds real, tangible, and accessible (Orsi 2005, 73–109). Orsi reminds us that when religiosity as promoted by religious authorities is incorporated into their followers' everyday lived religions, it most often occurs through identifiable embodied practices. It is not only Catholic forms of popular religion that produce effective embodied practices, however. Colleen McDannell (1995) shows how, throughout American history, such embodied practices as the wearing of special garments and the

giving of religious objects have been important ways by which ordinary Protestants, Mormons, and Evangelicals, as well as Catholics, experienced their religious worlds as real and accessible.

Although the "long Reformation" historically resulted in many popular religious practices being defined as no longer properly "religious," many people today continue to use popular religious expressions to address material concerns through embodied practices. Nor do these practitioners fit the stereotypes of "popular religion." For example, many highly educated, economically comfortable, fully acculturated, nonimmigrant Christians, Jews, Muslims, and persons of non-Western religious backgrounds turn to popular religious practices to address their need for health, healing, fertility, safe childbirth, and a "good" death (see, e.g., the studies reported in Barnes and Sered 2005).[5]

What might we see differently if we focused on the ordinary, everyday embodied practices by which people, individually and collectively, literally live their religions? Elsewhere, I have examined how contemporary patterns of spirituality are linked with embodied practices pertaining to food preparation and singing (McGuire 2003c), health and healing (McGuire 1988, 1996), gender and sexuality (McGuire 1994; 2003b), and pragmatic material concerns (McGuire 2000). Here, I draw two somewhat different examples of how some contemporary patterns of spirituality involve embodied practices: gardening and dancing. Each of these examples further suggests the fruitfulness of studying people's embodied practices and not merely the ideas behind them.

"*You Must First Have a Body*": Gardening as a Spiritual Discipline

During my research on health and healing, I became aware of gardening as a significant embodied practice in the spiritual lives of many people today. For that project, my research assistants and I recorded literally hundreds of narratives describing spiritual meanings of health and illness, body rituals for healing and holiness, and a vast array of body symbols. Exemplifying this attention to the body, one middle-aged professional, a member of an Eastern-inspired meditation center, explained, "We all are given this body only for the purpose of transcending into another plane of awareness, which does not require a body and would not really function with one—you wouldn't want a body. . . . You want to eventually transcend this bodily existence, because it is very limited . . . but, in order to do that, *you must first have a body*." He proceeded to link this "having" a body with attentiveness to one's body through meditation, body practices (e.g., Tai Chi, yoga poses, and breathing exercises), and other mind-body disciplines, such as eating mindfully. The goal of this attentiveness to body is deeper levels of consciousness, balance, and harmony.

According to many healing groups (based on various nonmedical approaches to healing), the physical performance of such body practices accomplishes what it

represents. Body practices make body metaphor a reality (McGuire 1996). Respondents from a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions used such metaphors not just to describe an idea supporting their practices but to try to capture the essence of the practice itself. For example, one woman described her form of Christian meditation as "touching lives." Other respondents described such mind-body practices as "walking peace," "breathing energy," and "resting in the light." An elderly man described his walking meditation as an efficacious form of peace activism. Unlike peace demonstrators, he explained, when he is "walking peace," observers would not necessarily know that he was engaging in peace activism, but they would sense that he was moving from a "deeply spiritual place."

For some people, a physically practiced spirituality is also linked with the earth or nature. The embodied practices of gardening were central in the lived religions of several respondents in my research. One woman, the mother of three young children, had built a greenhouse window so she could, in all seasons, grow wheatgrass to extract daily a nutritional juice for her family. She had begun gardening for purely practical reasons because homegrown wheatgrass and vegetables were more affordable and, freshly picked, more nutritious. She already engaged in numerous practices for health and healing, and when she began gardening she added several new personal practices, such as saying blessings as she planted the wheatgrass plots for the week and again as she harvested.

A recently retired man described how his garden had become something of a neighborhood shrine, attracting several visitors daily in summertime. He had begun the gardening project to occupy himself and to please his wife (who complained that the front yard looked "ratty"). Since his sense of smell had been declining, he decided to plant lots of pleasing but strong-scented flowers—mainly, rose bushes. Because roses reminded him of Saint Mary (a deeply embodied religious meaning, in itself), he decided to create "a Mary garden." His wife was delighted but insisted: "No cheap statues." So he took that as a challenge to find every "natural" way to evoke Mary's presence, without having an actual statue (although he still hoped someday to find one that his wife would consider tasteful). As he planned a rock "grotto," fountain, and flower beds, he noticed that he always sat on an upended pot in a particular corner, thinking about Mary's presence, so he put a cement bench there for contemplating the finished garden. When the roses came into full bloom in his garden, he noticed two neighbors sitting on that cement bench. He told them they were always welcome to rest there, to which the woman responded that she already knew she was welcome because she felt so close to the Virgin there. The man himself created a routine of starting each day, weather permitting, on the bench, contemplating Mary's presence in his own garden.

One woman, who described herself as a "nonpracticing Lutheran," called gardening her daily "worship service."[6] She had begun organic gardening for her children's sake, when they were little, but as she got "into" gardening, she came to think of it as a valuable spiritual discipline, requiring patience, hope,

and "nurturing love." She engages contemplatively in such prosaic practices as preparing the compost. She engages her senses as she meditates, being intensely aware of the texture of the compost as she sifts it with her bare hands, yet staying deeply centered.

As her commitment to her spiritual practices grew, she had left her high-powered job as an editor at a major publishing house and had moved to a smaller home in a more rural community. There, her garden had a profound tranquillity, noticeable even to the first-time visitor. At the time of our interview, she was producing far more food than she needed, so she gave her produce to a food bank. Her new freelance job meant a greatly reduced income but allowed her to devote more time and attention to her meditation, her organic garden, and her involvement in a healing group. When she spoke of healing for others, she described the activities of this group. When she turned to her own healing, however, she spoke glowingly of the healing effects of working the soil, connecting with nature, and a near-mystical moment in the rain. In gardening, concrete embodied practices linked mind, body, and spirit. For example, she described the spiritual and emotional exhilaration of staying "fully present" on a warming spring day, while kneeling with now-arthritic knees and hips to crumble clods of soil lightly over a row of newly planted seeds. For her, soil, seed, body, and spirit are linked in the practice of gardening.

" 'Til by Turning, Turning, We Come 'round Right": Dance as Religious Practice and Spiritual Experience

This line from the familiar Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" refers to an important part of Shaker spirituality: regular participation in elaborate meetinghouse dances for worship. Because they believed that the millennial kingdom of God was already present in every detail of their everyday world, Shakers paid attention to those details in embodied practices of work and prayer. Such embodied practices resulted in the extraordinary fruits of Shaker labor—not only the aesthetically pleasing crafting of furniture for which they are still remembered but also everyday tasks like repairing shoes, sewing clothes, and growing and preserving food. Because every detail of everyday living mattered religiously, embodied practices included such details as the exact order for getting out of bed and getting dressed each morning (see Andrews 1953). The Shakers' many ritual dances were equally precise embodied practices. But dancing evoked more than spiritual attentiveness. Dancing produced (and was produced by) powerful ecstatic experiences. In dancing, the entire community experienced the very meaning of living in the "New Jerusalem."[7]

For many Christians of that era (and since!), however, dancing was the opposite of religious. Indeed, partly as a result of the "long Reformation," many Christians came to view dancing not only as profane but even as licentious

and dangerous. Whereas late medieval Christians had regularly celebrated weddings, wakes, and religious holidays with considerable dancing and other festivities, after the "long Reformation," most Christian churches tried (with varying degrees of success) to ban or at least to separate such "profane" festivities as dancing from religious celebrations. Some religious groups treated dancing as sinful, in itself, while others treated it as an occasion for sin or, at best, a distraction from godly behaviors. For instance, a Baptist minister proclaimed in the early twentieth century, "Of the 500,000 fallen women in the United States, over 300,000 started from the ballroom" (quoted in Dunning 1998, 12).

Thus, it represented considerable attitudinal change for many late twentieth-century Americans to come to view dancing as an appropriate liturgical performance in churches, synagogues, and other religious settings. While bringing dance into worship represents a crack in the disembodied facade of Western religious traditions, in most instances it is an embodied practice only for the dancers themselves. Others in the congregation are a passive audience, much as they are for the musicians (often, paid professionals) who sing and play for the service. An interesting exception, however, is the dance ministry of an African Methodist Episcopal church in Queens. According to its choreographer-director, part of the goal for the 300-member group of dancers (men, women, and children) is to engage so intensely the entire congregation that all of them experience transformation. She explained:

> People are coming in with issues. They're losing their home. They've lost their job. The bill collectors are coming, or someone needs a heart transplant. We stand in the gap, as soldiers in the army, dancing the fight for them no matter what their issues are. . . . If [they are] not [able to leave there changed], we're not doing our job. And that means we have to get out of ourselves so that they don't see us dancing, they see God in the dance. (quoted in Dunning 1998, 12)

In that setting, the improvisational dance is an embodied practice that both expresses and accomplishes praise and worship, while simultaneously addressing the real material (and bodily) concerns of the congregation's members.

In my study of healing groups, I encountered one group that used dance as its preferred healing modality. It met in a Unitarian Church, but only a few of the regulars were Unitarians. Most of the group considered themselves to be, in the words of one woman, "deeply spiritual, but not interested in religion." They limited their membership to women, so that all could seek healing for physical, emotional, and relationship problems they might hesitate to bring up in men's presence. Many of the group's dances and other ritual practices were openly "invented" for an occasion or need. For instance, for a rape victim, the group created a dance sequence expressing fear and anger being transformed into inner strength and calm.

One woman, who was introduced to similar spiritual dance in a predominantly Jewish feminist healing group, had developed a personal spiritual dance practice that she called "dancing my life." Her religious involvement at her synagogue was sporadic, but she put considerable time and energy into her spiritual practices, individual as well as collective. Her most important spiritual practice (usually solo) was improvised dance. Sometimes daily, but at least once a week, she identified a theme that had arisen in her life, either recently or recurringly (e.g., "being alone," "flying," and "unfolding"). After meditating briefly on the theme, but without planning her actions, she danced to express that theme. Often, what evolved in the dance was a complete surprise to her, but she almost always felt like she had expressed, in a satisfyingly integrated way, her deeper feelings and central life meanings. About once a month, she danced with two of her friends. They informally rotate the choice of themes and music or poetry to go with it, trying to keep the theme broad enough that all participating can relate to it somehow (e.g., "Springtime Hope," and "Time-Sickness"). In bodily movement, they express their connection to each other, to their own deep longings, and to life itself.

Conclusion

Each of these kinds of embodied practices *reflects* and *reproduces* different kinds of spiritual experiences. In each, the body is integrally present and participating. When gardening is done as an embodied religious or spiritual practice, it is more than a practical means to a desired end, such as a meal. It can engage the senses, evoke memories and imagination, and reflect a deep connection with the natural environment. It can produce an integrated mind/body/spirit experiential awareness of spiritual truths or religious presence. As an embodied practice, dancing can tap emotions and deeply embedded memories. In ritual settings, such as the women's healing group described earlier, these embodied practices have creative potential to transmute painful or destructive memories and emotions into sources of emotional support, joy, and vitality. In other settings, dancing can communicate joy, gratitude, and worshipfulness. Collective embodied practices, such as dancing together, can produce an experiential sense of community and connectedness. Without the full involvement of the material body, religion is confined to the realm of cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions, theological ideas). Embodied practices—including mundane and seemingly unexceptional activities like dancing, preparing a meal, or holding a flower—can link people's materiality as humans with their spirituality.

Lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, and create the "stories out of which they live." And it is constituted through the practices by which people turn these "stories" into everyday action. Ordinary material existence—especially the human body—is the

very stuff of these meaningful practices. Religious and spiritual practices—even interior ones, such as contemplation—involve people's bodies and emotions, as well as their minds and spirits.

People's material bodies come to be linked with their religion-as-lived through both lofty and mundane embodied practices, often ritually restructuring their sense of space and time. Bodies matter because humans are not disembodied spirits. Individuals' religions become *lived* only through involving their bodies (as well as minds) and their emotions (as well as their cognitions). An individual's lived religion is expressed through just such embodied practices. But where religious authorities and institutions have excluded embodied practices as "not properly religious" or as "impure" and "sinful," is it any surprise that people engage in such practices in other settings? Understanding religions-as-lived requires, then, that we take seriously the full range of human religious practice, not only as we find it in religious institutions but equally as we find it in everyday embodied practices.

NOTES

1. This is not to say that many non-Western religions do not also have some form of denial of the body. Rather, the point is that the social sciences of religion have built uncritically upon assumptions embedded in Western (and particularly European) religious ways of thinking.

2. This definitional bias, privileging belief and cognitive aspects of religion, also became embedded in scholarly discourse, including the social sciences of religion. For example, sociology of religion uses survey instruments that attempt to tap respondents' "religion" or level of "religiosity" by asking them such questions as "Do you believe in life after death?" "Do you believe that the Bible is the literally true word of god?" and "Do you believe that using artificial contraception (birth control) is sinful?" Although the anthropology of religion has, historically, been more interested in observing actual religious practices, the field has only recently become self-critical of the earlier tendency to treat non-Western cultures as "other." Thus, "our" cultures' religions seemed superior, based on thought and "pure" beliefs, in contrast to the "Other's" religions that involved strange practices, such as exotic rituals, magic, and superstition. Anthropology has benefited from some decades of recent examination of the historical construction of scholarly discourse and method, especially as biases embedded in our concepts have affected our ethnographies themselves (see especially Asad 1993).

3. Clearly, the successes and failures of both the dominant religions in their efforts to control and the persons trying to resist that control depend on power and differential access to economic and symbolic resources. With considerable regularity, the people whose meaningful religious practices have been redefined by the powerful as not properly "religious" have been the poor, the women, the immigrants, the indigenous peoples of a colonized land, the "uneducated," the dispossessed.

4. See Klassen (2001, 2005) and Sered (2005) for examples from both Christian and Jewish, highly traditional and extremely nontraditional, as well as eclectic, spiritualities.

5. The same could be said of persons who engage in nonmedical healing practices and seek alternative (e.g., religious or spiritual) forms of healing, typically in conjunction with medical treatment, but sometimes in lieu of it (see McGuire 1988).

6. These vignettes describe actual interviewees, with important details altered to protect the anonymity of respondents.

7. On the ritual transformation of space in Shaker dances, see Lane (2001, 174–76).

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12

Touching the Transcendent: Rethinking Religious Experience in the Sociological Study of Religion

Courtney J. Bender

We wanted the touch of the real in the way that in an earlier period people wanted the touch of the transcendent.

—Stephen Greenblatt, "The Touch of the Real"

Cathy Morton[1] paused for a moment, and I took a sip of my tea, which had gone cold in the hour and a half since we started talking. Cathy was telling me about her spiritual journey, a long and fascinating story that included numerous details, serendipitous encounters, and a good dose of self-deprecating humor. Collecting her thoughts, Cathy smoothed out her jean skirt and resettled into the corner of the couch. Then she said:

> Now, where are we? In February of 2000, I'd been doing a lot of reading on reincarnation. All summer I'd read the Brian Weiss books. I said "OK it sounds good for him, but haven't experienced it myself. So, um, [it's] not real for me yet." I'm about to take the Reiki master training course. I go to a psychic—just to see what it's like to go to a psychic. And she says, "I sense that you're going to be involved with Oriental energy"—she got all this stuff right, ok. "I sense the Merlin presence around you," and I said, "Do you know where I was last summer?" and she said no, so I had to tell her that I'd been to Glastonbury Tor, because part of the whole Merlin thing is there. So, she said, that I was going to

> know what it was like to be Christed. And I didn't know what she was talking about. She just said this is going to be really important, and you know what it is when you experience it. "OK," I said.

Taking another breath, Cathy began to tell me about her Reiki master training course. From the beginning of learning this practice of energetic healing, she knew that she was supposed to teach it in addition to practicing it. Because her original Reiki teacher did not teach the master level, she sought out a new teacher and shortly found herself sitting with several other women in a Newton, Massachusetts, living room, ready to start the course of training that would make her a master. The teacher started with an "attunement," putting her hands on each of the women. During her turn Cathy recalled that she "felt the hugest amount of heat that—I could never imagine that that much energy could be going into one person." This was followed by a guided visualization during which, she said, each woman would meet her "Reiki guide": the spirit who would lead them and assist them in their healing work. Cathy continued:

> Now I'd been through this before and had never seen, really seen anybody, except for maybe those three Japanese people up on the ceiling [she had seen during her earlier Reiki training]. That didn't really feel like "meet your Reiki guide" to me. Plus, it wasn't real. So, I close my eyes. And I see Jesus. I see just his outline of his face, and long hair, and beard—and he looks beautiful. Thin face. He looks just like in all the Sunday school pictures. And he's smiling at me.
>
> And I go, "Oh, whoa whoa whoa—that's Jesus. That can't be my Reiki master. That can't be my Reiki guide, that's Jesus—he's Jesus!" So with my consciousness I go, "Shoo shoo shoo," and I try to erase this picture in my mind. [The teacher] has previously told us, you'll be in a field and then you'll get up a hill and when you get to the top of the hill your Reiki guide will be there. So I say, "Shoo shoo shoo." I tell Jesus to shoo, he can't possibly be my Reiki guide, and the next thing I see is, a beautiful field with waving golden grass, it's late summer, and Jesus is standing out in the middle of the field and he has his arms outstretched, and it's like that "Come to Me" pose from all those Sunday school books. And I'm thinking, "Jesus? This doesn't make any sense to me." And then I hear her, the teacher's voice say, there's only three more steps and you'll be there [at the top of the hill].
>
> And I decided in my mind that I wanted the hill I was to climb to be Glastonbury Tor. I chose that on purpose as my imaginary hill. And there are steps on Glastonbury Tor. So I went up the last three steps, and I looked up. And at that moment I felt myself leave my body, out of my head. The top of my head opened up, and I went whooshing through a tunnel, and I knew I was traveling through time

> and space, just like winds, through the wind, and I'm not processing "Oh my God, I'm having an out-of-body experience. . . . I'm just like, this is cool!"

I had met Cathy two weeks before this soggy October morning, when I attended a mystical arts and talent show held at the Swedenborgian Chapel in Cambridge where Cathy gave a talk on past-life regression therapy. I introduced myself during the intermission, and she told me with some excitement that she had already heard all about me and my research from a mutual acquaintance. My goal, as I told Cathy, was to understand how people became spiritual practitioners. I told her that I was particularly interested in the social networks and groups that she and others like her participate in, and where they learned the practices that they engaged. Cathy told me that she was interested in this, too, and invited me to her house.

Religious experiences took center stage for the people I met during my field research. By this, I mean that Cathy and others like her placed in the centers of their religious stories and their religious lives complex questions about experience, stories of their occurrence, practices that might hasten their occurrence, debates about how they could be encountered, and so on. Religious experiences were orienting features (and also sometimes disorienting features) within their religious worlds.

The centrality of religious experiences caused some fruitful tension in my work and analysis, for, as I had told Cathy, I was studying the social, lived religious experience of modern mystics and spiritual practitioners. My frame was focused on *daily* religious experiences, that is, but it was becoming increasingly clear that their emphasis was often on a different sort of experience, where the emphasis is on (presumably nondaily, nonhabitual) *religious* experience. This difference in emphasis, which is how I first thought of it, led to questions about the place of "religious experience" within the study of lived religion, or within any sociological study of daily religious life. And this, in turn, led me to consider how sociological understandings of "religious experience" reproduce a set of ideas about the shape and boundaries of sociological inquiry into religion (mirrored and refracted perhaps in distinctions between experience and account, or even between spirituality and religion). Encounters with people like Cathy, in short, prompted me to pay closer attention both to the presence of religious experiences in contemporary mystics' lived realities and to their absence within much recent academic research on contemporary American religion.

In this chapter I briefly review some of the recent scholarly works on religious experience and argue that this work demands of sociologists more than a "descriptive" definition of religious experience. It further requires that sociologists move religious experience closer to the center of the study of religion. Doing so will enable us to view religious experiences as sites of the religious

imaginary, of religious history, and of theology. It will allow us to understand how experiences are constructed and lived in multiple expressions. In the second half of the chapter, I identify some of the ways we might interpret religious experiences once we have this in mind. I will focus on how history and imagination developed fruitfully within Cathy's experience of "being Christed" to create an authentic religious experience.

Studying Religious Experience

In a recent volume, Martin Jay (2005) states that the numerous proliferating "songs" of experience in Western intellectual conversations make it impossible to fully historicize the concept of experience within a single rubric. He notes the trajectory of "religious experience" as one such song within this multivoiced chorus, emerging as an identifiable "type" of experience in the post-Enlightenment period and gaining volume and power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. William James's definition lies within this lineage and is probably best known to sociologists: religious experience is the "feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" ([1903] 1982, 31).

James's definition, like others within this intellectual tradition, emphasizes that experiences happen, that they happen furthermore to individuals who have not anticipated them happening. They are felt (apprehended) rather than cognitively known. All these elements emphasize religious experience as an individual and noncultural (or precultural, precognitive) and bounded event. These elements that make them real also make them, James argues, real only for those who directly experience them. The individual, unpracticed, precultural, and affective qualities of religious experiences are not usually noted within sociological literature, but these ideas about religious experiences clearly mark the discipline. Emphasis on the individual and precognitive (or noncognitive) constitution of religious experience suggests that it is not really the domain of sociological inquiry at all. Sociologists have, by and large, ceded the study of religious experiences to other disciplines better equipped to focus on these issues, including philosophy and psychology.

Other sociologists have focused on the noncultural aspects of "experience" to posit a space occupied by true religion, a space that remains fundamentally immune from sociological analysis (and reduction). Peter Berger mobilizes such a definition of "religious experience" to mark the proper boundaries of sociological inquiries into religious reality. His claims in *The Heretical Imperative* (1979, 44) that religious experiences are prior to cultural suggestion are one example of this move. "Religious experience," he argues, "*comes to be* embodied in traditions, which mediate it to those who have not had it themselves and

which institutionalize it for them as well as for those who had" (46, emphasis added). The process through which raw, analytically inaccessible religious experiences are translated and domesticated into specific cultural-historical traditions is "a constant in human history" (53–54), further arguing that all religious traditions and cultures are based on original experiences of this kind. In short, Berger defines experiences as that which are constitutive of real religion, in no way reducible to the traditions and communities into which they are translated, which remain the appropriate settings for sociological analysis.

As a consequence, sociologists can study experience *accounts* but cannot study religious experiences *themselves*. This has been an extremely powerful argument: even though fewer sociologists might find Berger's argument fully compelling in today's academic climate, the distinction between an experience and its account remains embedded within even recent culturally sensitive studies of religious experience. We can hear this song clearly, for example, in David Yamane's recent discussion of narrative approaches to religious experience, where he states that the distinction between experience and account is a "fundamental fact." Sociologists who want to study religious experience, he says, "must bracket any claims to apprehending religious experience itself and instead give our full attention to the primary way people concretize . . . their experiences . . . through narratives" (2000, 175–76; see also McRoberts 2004).

Although the discipline of religious studies shared this "fundamental fact" of religious experience with sociologists for many decades, at this point it is fair to say that philosophers and historians of religion have largely abandoned it. Wayne Proudfoot (1985) argued that while Friedrich Schleiermacher had presented the best possible definition and argument for a precultural, precognitive religious experience, it was a definition beset by logical and philosophical fallacies that could not be internally resolved. Proudfoot's argument has subsequently prompted religious studies scholars in a number of other subfields to inquire into the historical development of this notion. The growing history of "religious experience" demonstrates how deeply embedded it is in multiple strands of Enlightenment thinking. An idea of *individual* "religious experience" developed as a key component of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century arguments about individual authority and autonomy. Notions about individual *religious* experience provided protective and apologetic arguments about "pure" religion that could remain immune from Enlightenment-era reductionisms. Once naturalized into a taken-for-granted idea, "religious experience" played a pivotal role in developing arguments for the possibility of a comparative study of world religions and was likewise mobilized in changing regimes of scientific inquiry.[2]

This research destabilizes any claim that religious experience is a fundamental fact, descriptive of phenomena to which its nonexperiencers do not have access. In addition, this research demonstrates in convincing ways that it is important to study how this historically emerging and now culturally naturalized

category has shaped both "academic" and "lay" experience of religious experience. As one example, we can think about how the sociological distinction between experience and account underlies and reinforces many recent discussions of contemporary American spirituality. A developing body of research pays close attention to how communally prescribed narratives and embodied practices shape religious experiences and suggests ways to engage how experiences are culturally shaped (not merely translated into culture post hoc).[3] Still, concepts of a precultural individual religious experience tend to reemerge in scholarly analyses of people who do not have apparent religious communities.

To take one recent example, Robert Wuthnow's (1998) study of contemporary spirituality includes a discussion of spiritual parvenus that hinges on their "out of the ordinary" experiences. Wuthnow states that many people's lives are not transformed, or even jilted a little bit, by such extraordinary events. For people without a community, these (precommunal) experiences do not propel parvenus to join a religious group or organize their lives differently. In large part, Wuthnow says, these experiences remind or suggest to such persons that something "more" exists (134ff.).[4] In Wuthnow's narrative, experiences are first experienced outside of a religious or cultural worldview and then may (or may not) be integrated into one.

Wuthnow's study is built on cultural nuance and is on the whole a study of spirituality's social construction. The presence of "religious experience" within this study is, for that reason, all the more notable, demonstrating how deeply embedded it is within sociological thinking about religion. It continues to mark out territory—not just of what is and is not accessible to sociologists for analysis but also of what is in fact "religious" or "spiritual." Given the claim that religious experience is a cross-cultural and cross-temporal category, we might inquire how it likewise reinforces an ahistorical understanding of American spirituality and, notably, how it also reinforces the ontological claims made by mystics and experiencers themselves.

For, although the logic of "religious experience" remains embedded in contemporary sociological treatments, it is notably also mobilized in numerous ways by people like Cathy Morton. These definitions are not "merely" academic. They are thoroughly embedded within the discourses about experiences that we scholars encounter "in the field." With this in mind, we can approach Cathy's experience as taking place within, and extending, an intricate, theologically dense set of logics and genres that shape her out-of-body experience.[5]

Being Christed

Cathy's experience, then, can be seen not only as a narrative of personal spiritual development and calling that emphasizes her singular, individual encounter with a being of light but also as a process of construction. If, as Susan Harding

(2001) says, "speaking is believing" for Christian fundamentalists, then speaking is experiencing for contemporary mystics. Telling the experience is, in some ways, experiencing it: the space where the telling ends and the experiencing begins is complicated in Cathy's story by the way the experience "answers" questions that might destabilize her experience's truth and validity. The validity of the experience is coterminous with the experience itself, at least in the way that Cathy told me about it on this rainy October morning. As such, Cathy's narrative, while emplotted, is also organized through several conversations that make the narrative and its meaning real. As the plot of individual, ineffable experience calls attention away from these genres and their social history, it is nonetheless important to hear in them the histories and submerged connections that the plot is built upon. By attending to the speech genres that constitute experience,[6] we can listen to how Cathy arrives at an authentic and powerful experience.

Cathy thought that being "whooshed" out of her head was "cool," but soon her glee transformed into a more profound appreciation. As she recalled:

> I look up, and there's a man, a robed older man there, with long, wavy hair, a long wavy beard, and he looks just like a picture of "the ancient" that's in a William Blake watercolor—I don't even remember which one it is. But it looks just like one of those pictures of one of those old, sage philosopher guide people. And my heart leaps right out of my chest and I go, "Oh, my God, it's Joseph!"
>
> I don't know who Joseph is, but my soul knows it's Joseph, and I'm so happy to see him. And he's beaming at me. He stretches out his left hand as I'm looking to him, so it's to my right, and he, the gesture is, "Look who I've brought for you." And there, next to Joseph and five times taller than him, is this outline of light. And the outline has an area where the head would be, and bumps for the shoulders. It's not a person, it's not a body, it's like a being of light. And I'm—and I go—and I move toward the being of light and the being of light moves towards me, and I'm just molecules of energy and I understand that at the time, and all my molecules of energy intermingle with the molecules of energy of this entity of light. And I feel like I've died and gone to heaven. I'm like ahhh. And this deep booming, booming male voice says, "Welcome home, Cathy," and I start to sob.
>
> And now, part of me realizes that my body is in a chair in Newton, in somebody's living room, and that I'm in a room with other women, and I'm sobbing, and that they're all meditating, and I can't make too much noise because I'll disturb them. And part of me just wants to be enveloped in this energy—I'm aware—that's where my main consciousness is, up in this cloud of light. And I just want to stay there for ever and ever, it's so beautiful. I'm sobbing with happiness.

And then, the beam pulls away, and I feel whooshing, going back to my body, because the teacher's saying now it's time to return, you know, you've met your guide. And I was absolutely speechless for a long time, absolutely speechless. We had to, we changed locations, we went back to the sofas, and then she said, "Who wants to share" and I said, "Oh! I want to tell you." But I waited. I felt like I was just so blown away I didn't want to upstage everybody. So the first woman said, "It's interesting because I wasn't expecting this, but I saw Jesus." And then the second woman said, "That's interesting, because I saw Jesus too. Jesus was there. Jesus is my Reiki guide." And I'm like, "Hmm, there's a pattern here." So I describe how first I saw him and then I went up out of my body. And the teacher's eyes are bugging out of her head and—you know, I don't think any of her students had ever reported anything quite like that before. And then the fourth woman said, "I didn't see anything." And we're like, "Oh, that's OK, the first few times we didn't see anything." We knew. She's Jewish. Jesus isn't part of her paradigm. So of course she didn't see him.

I personally now believe that—I mean, what was Jesus doing when he was healing? He was healing with his spiritual energy, he was somehow channeling divine energy to these people. So I believe that he was a Reiki master too, and that is sort of what he came to teach about—healing with love, and with divine love, it just got twisted around a little bit over the millennia. So I consider him my boss now—my Reiki guide. I have fundamentalist Christian background friends who think I'm going to the devil because I'm doing hocus pocus with Reiki, and they just don't understand that I'm doing Reiki from a Christian perspective.

I later realized that that experience of going up to the light and being embraced by it was what the psychic lady had meant by being "Christed." Somehow I had been exposed to that Christ energy, whether it was Jesus—I often wondered afterwards, after reading more about souls and soul development and now I'm into books about people's souls'—the different ways that people describe soul growth. Was that my oversoul? I didn't know what that was, but it was so welcoming. And I know that when I die that's where I'm going. And its like, "Wow, now I am really not afraid of death. At all."

And my hospice work took on this whole new dimension. I was able to talk to people and say, look, I've been up to the light, it's wonderful, don't be afraid. And it seems to really—I mean people have read it, they have mostly heard of near-death experience—I feel like I had a near-death experience without being near death. So, that was

> February of 2000. And that was really, really important to me. And the fact that it was Glastonbury Tor was really really significant. And I don't know if you saw this little statue. [Cathy stood up and walked over to a small table in the corner topped with a photograph of Glastonbury and several small objects and statues.] This is like a little statue of Jesus holding, embracing, a baby. And that's what it felt like. And it's all white, too. It's a Lenox statue, and when I saw that I said, "I'm not into statues of Jesus, but I have to have that." Because if you can imagine as a little baby, being held and just loved unconditionally, it doesn't matter what you've done or who you were, it was just that amount of unconditional love. So that's one of my special objects on my table. I bought that to commemorate that experience.

The Validity of Experience

This powerful event marked Cathy's body, her soul, and her perception of the world. The "real ness" of this event is not easily won, however: it becomes real only as she overcomes her own skepticism, doubts, and scientific view of the world, views that are, furthermore, ones that she assumes that I hold, as a "social scientist" who must be interested, she tells me, in issues of validity.[7] Although I do not voice such concerns or questions during the interview, Cathy implicates me in her quest for a valid experience: Cathy anticipates and builds into the experience the answers to those (myself included) who might challenge her claims. These answers, however, are built in, presumed, and juxtaposed as multiple ways of knowing, drawing on various senses, on ideas about the relationship of the body to the mind, and on expectations about the links between past and future.

To better see and hear how Cathy does this, we can pay attention to several ways that voices, visions, bodies, and "culture" circulate in this story. We can listen and see, in other words, how Cathy builds answers to objections and concerns about the validity of the experience. These "answers" are not direct (nor are the questions), but rather indirect. She answers them while also narrating and in so doing orchestrates others' voices and her own to make the experience real once more.

Cathy begins this story with an oracular voice, that of the psychic who tells her that she will be "Christed." Cathy takes pains to note that she does not know the psychic, and that the psychic does not know her. But the psychic gets things right, Cathy says, and provides a prediction that she will be "Christed." Importantly, the psychic refuses to give Cathy any context for what this might mean, when it will happen, or what it will feel like. The oracular voice of this psychic (about whom Cathy says she is skeptical) frames this story and sets up many of the themes and ideas that will follow.

Cathy then tells me about her desire to become a Reiki master and goes to some length to tell me why she arrives at the Reiki teacher's house with no prior contact with the teacher or the other students. No one there knows what Cathy is about, or vice versa. Indeed, her social distance from these women continues throughout the first part of the story, and the narrative she creates is characterized by an absence of voices and a dearth of social ties. Not only voices but also bodies and connections are missing here: until she finds herself on Glastonbury, Cathy shows herself to be a seeker extraordinaire, following her own path without any assistance or suggestion from others.

The absence of social ties and others' voices allows Cathy to tell a story about experience that happens precisely to *her*, the individual. Indeed, Cathy struggles throughout the experience (particularly as she shoos away Jesus) with the problem of social suggestion. She is dismissive of the Jesus who appears to her as not "real," but rather most likely an internalized (and possibly pedestrian or even childlike) depiction of the divine tied directly to her own religious culture. This Jesus, furthermore, does not speak but merely beckons, in contrast to the disembodied voice (who remains unnamed) on Glastonbury Tor, who identifies her as "home" in this astral realm.

Notably, the voices of women in Newton arise in the story after Cathy's experience has already happened. At that point the women in the room confirm and bolster the reality of Cathy's experience. The other women's experiences with seeing Jesus call to our attention the clear problem that subliminal, subconscious cultural categories play in Cathy's experience. Their experiences with Jesus, positioned after Cathy's experience with the Christ, could easily call into question the validity of Cathy's out-of-body experience. Cathy is very clear about her own suspicions about images and visualizations that she recognizes, about the cultural "paradigms" that shape encounters with the divine and even what we desire to see.

Crucial to Cathy's experience likewise are various understandings of vision, seeing, and their links with believing. Cathy readily understands that she can will herself into seeing things, and likewise that her own mind's eye, in a guided visualization, will likely be marked by cultural ideas and images that she carries with her. These, she says, are not "real." As we learn, in order for Cathy's experience to be real, what she sees must be something not easily chalked up to her culture. This is an issue that she engages in several ways in her story. Cathy's deep desire to know the truth and the way the universe works, she suggests early on, makes her particularly susceptible to easy answers, and she is always on guard, checking whether things are real "to her." She notes, for example, that while Brian Weiss's books are interesting, they were not "real" for her yet. She remains a skeptic as the Reiki session begins: she has no expectation that she will really see anything when the guided visualization happens, and she remembers a previous class in which all she saw were "three Japanese

people" on the ceiling, whom she waved to but dismissed as "not real." She did not, in other words, have high expectations that this guided visualization would be any different.

Cathy's skepticism is so deeply entrenched that when she sees Jesus' face emerge in outline and then in full form, she immediately rejects it. At this moment, however, things begin to change swiftly. It is, after all, one thing to reject three smiling Japanese figures on the ceiling as "not real," but it is another thing altogether to shoo away Jesus, even given her concerns about his image being merely a result of cultural suggestion. Cathy, however, does shoo him away, convinced in her mind that she knows better than to be convinced by a Sunday school portrait. This is a dangerous game but one that is nonetheless rewarded. After refusing Jesus a second time, "she" is propelled forward into a realm where she will encounter a more authentic, pure, energetic Christ, one that she suggests stands behind the historical Jesus.

It is important to note that Cathy's concern about moving past Protestant Sunday school culture is not a purely critical position. In fact, her story, its summation, and, most important, the voices of the chorus of women who have also seen the historical, embodied Jesus during their visualization suggest that there is truth in all of what Cathy saw, including the Jesus that she met in the field. Indeed, Cathy's being "Christed" did not contradict their encounters with Jesus but rather added an extra layer of reality, each story reinforcing the aura of the others (including Cathy's own encounter with the physical Jesus). Even as Cathy registers a difference between their encounters, within the narrative these visions of Jesus/Christ work together to confirm her experience, to bolster "their" visions' reality, and, interestingly, to unsettle the division between the cultural and the real (even as it depends on their distinction).

In Cathy's understanding, vision and voice both contaminate and call into question the reality of the experience of being Christed and lead her to a radical skepticism that is at once both dangerous and rewarded. In a momentous whoosh, Cathy leaves her body and goes out of the top of her head. No longer connected to her body and, we soon learn, to the part of her brain that thinks consciously, Cathy is no longer a skeptic and can only muster the reaction "*this is cool!*" Arriving in the astral plane removes Cathy from a thinking, sentient, skeptical realm and places her in a realm where her soul and her heart lead the way to determining what is real. On the astral plane Cathy no longer wonders what is real. Her soul and her emotions now hold authority, and this "knowing" eclipses anything that occurs here on earth. As Cathy pronounces, "*I* don't know who Joseph is, but my *soul* knows." Cathy's soul, described here as a molecular, energetic self, merges with another energetic being seen only in outline. This connection on the astral plane becomes real in part through the juxtaposition between the cognitive, cultural, social self that remains in Newton, and the feeling, ahistorical divine self that travels and knows something entirely other.

Going "out of body" is marked by a shift in Cathy's story from studied skepticism to full acceptance of her soul and emotion. This shift, however, is far from clean, given that the validity of her emotions and her soul's ideas are presented within the very real body that never leaves the ground. While Cathy leaves her body and perhaps even her "I" behind, it is her body that displays the experience and thus renders it real.

This is most strikingly present in the way Cathy talks about her body, of which she remains conscious throughout the out-of-body experience. Cathy's tears bridge two spaces of consciousness. Her holy, astral tears cannot be cried in a realm where she is not a body. Her sobbing in the astral plane is thus marked not there but rather within her flesh. As such, the astral plane materializes within her Newton-bound body where everyone can see (and even be disturbed by) her sobbing self.[8]

The messy tangling of Cathy's physical and astral bodies (and energetic selves) is mirrored in the messy and unclear juxtaposition of Jesus as an identifiable body and the nonnamed being who rises up above her and with whom she intermingles. While Cathy is in the astral plane, no one identifies the large being of energy as the Christ. Joseph merely points as if to say "look who I've brought," and, as Cathy says, it is her soul but not her cognitive brain that identifies this being. The aura of mystery and the inability (or refusal) to name this energetic being is further underlined by Cathy's refusal to directly call this being Christ. Rather, she only refers to the experience as "being Christed" and calls attention to her own questioning, after the fact, of what had happened to her. We might note here that much as Cathy's "soul" knew who this being was, so Cathy guides those who listen to her story toward an indirect "recognition." As she does, Cathy becomes a guide who, like the astral Joseph, points those who listen to her toward the unnamed divine. She orients me, the listener, toward a position where I might also apprehend it.[9]

The genres shaping Cathy's experience have less to do with what the experience "says" (i.e., about healing, Cathy's role in life, and the message she is supposed to give others) than with its validity. In this story, a valid experience is embodied and affective rather than cognitive, one that happens presumably without social or cultural suggestion, and to an individual in her solitude. Even as Cathy establishes these points, they are nonetheless complicated by her efforts to explain the importance of the narrative itself and, as we will see, to describe what happened on the astral plane. It is, in other words, easier to explain and describe what is not an experience than what is. Despite the absences that mark the space of experience as both divine and noncommunicable (e.g., Cathy's refusal to name the being of light), Cathy nonetheless also strives to communicate what happened on the astral Glastonbury, and she turns to particular images and metaphors as she does so. What can we learn from these?

Theologies of Experience

We might begin by asking what cultural sources shape the way Cathy experiences this experience as authentic, and through which she imagines and lives a connection with the divine. All the questioning and skepticism that Cathy voices, and which lead up to her being "out of body," call attention away from the very specific images and bodies that appear in the astral plane of Glastonbury. The depictions in the first half of her story stand in sharp contrast to those in the second half. Once she has left her body, she has also left her skepticism. She does not tell us that these images are what "came to her." Rather, she uses the images as only close approximations of what really happened and what she really saw when she was without the benefit (or, we might say, the limitations) of cognition, vision, or a body. Cathy's juxtaposition of the daily and the astral serve to caution those who listen against focusing too much on the particular images she calls upon to describe Glastonbury, or reading them as mere "cultural suggestion." It is, indeed, not our task to reduce her experience to an account framed in a secondary set of cultural depictions (that is certainly not my interest here). That said, it is nonetheless important to note how this shift from the daily to the astral is marked in Cathy's story, and what kinds of images and ideas are set apart through it.

The images that Cathy calls upon to describe what happens in astral Glastonbury are particularly fascinating, as they resonate with Swedenborgian and Jamesian theologies of experience, insofar as they are articulated in Cathy's language, symbols, and genres. Cathy explicitly invokes William Blake, the eighteenth-century poet and artist (most famous for his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*) who championed nontraditional spiritual views, including Swedenborgianism. By way of Blake, she also alludes to the British legend that Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail to the "shores of Albion," a story in which Glastonbury figures prominently (Bowman 2000). She mentions that "Joseph" looks like Blake's painting of the "Ancient," perhaps grafting Blake's image, *Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion* to one of his most famous paintings, *The Ancient of Days*. In that painting, a male figure bends down out of a fiery sun into the darkness, two beams of light emanating from his outstretched hand. Although Cathy refuses to describe the "being of light" on astral Glastonbury in any other way, these concrete images give shape to what she experiences there and also situate them within a particular history of experiences.

These references themselves thus resonate with a long-standing tradition of religious experiences, developed in the esoteric writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as notions of holy correspondences and human ability to realize the divine within their own bodies. Cathy's experience lends ballast to Leigh Schmidt's observation that contemporary spirituality is marked by a "notable revitalization of Swedenborgian mysticism" (2000, 246). Similarly, Cathy wonders out loud if she has met her "oversoul," drawing William James's language

directly into contact with her experience. Cathy's experience is, in these ways, both marked by the tension between "experience" and "account" and linked to ongoing theological and theoretical discussions of how such experience can be related to others. Such historical arcs and connections are, as we see, often obscured by the experiences we hear Cathy and others describe. They provide a picture with the marks of historical connection deleted or erased in order to better establish their authentic links with the divine.

That Cathy is drawing upon particular, historically embedded theologies of experience is obscured in some ways by the fact that she also participates in a more traditional religious community. For Cathy not only heals with Reiki and channels out-of-body spirits but also sings in the choir of her mainline Protestant church and was until recently its primary Sunday school superintendent. Although Cathy claims the experience of Christ, in other words, she nonetheless arrives at the end of this experience to identify *Jesus* as her Reiki master. As Cathy heals sick friends and clients and smoothes over the rougher edges of bodily death in her work as a hospice volunteer, she relies on a Jesus who is also fully embodied, and whose touch and unconditional love can be felt in a fully embodied, maternal embrace.[10]

The Touch of the Transcendent

There is much more to ponder in Cathy's experience, and I hope that readers will hear in what I have written just the beginnings of a fruitful enterprise. I hope, likewise, that this story and others like it might make a strong case for the importance of placing religious experiences closer to the center of sociological evaluation. Religious experiences have rarely been central to our line of work, arguably due to the power of people like Cathy to assert that their experience accounts are descriptive rather than inscriptive or prescriptive. In taking Cathy and people like her "at their word," sociologists reinforce the project wherein individual religious experience is viewed as a "natural" occurrence without its own history. By listening to the ways that religious experiencers render experiences valid and authentic, however, we can find in such stories links to historically articulated understandings of "experience," and we can train sociological attention to the genres that constitute not only experience accounts but experiences "themselves." In this approach, both the notion that accounts follow experiences and the notion that accounts are all we have are called into question: in Cathy's story, we begin to see how account and experience are tied together in complex relation to each other, and to the embodied cultural and social worlds in which they are experienced and expressed.

In other words, this approach renews attention to the theologies that are likewise embedded in sociological assertions that experiences and their accounts are

in fact two moments (one sequestered and hidden from view, one available for interpretation). The study of "religious experience" is far from the only place where scholars make such distinctions or where they matter in scholarly discourse. But, that said, bringing experiences into the center of our studies calls to our attention the history of religious experience and its own role in shaping our discipline. With these issues in mind, we might, for example, begin to interrogate how theologies of religious experience shape the recent turn to "lived religion." Although I do not believe that the intent of the recent turn to the daily necessarily excludes the experiential, in some accounts daily life is emphatically viewed as mundane and ordinary.[11] It might be worthwhile to ask where, or whether, there is a place for the transcendent or the divine, in this study of "daily life."

In the epigraph that begins this chapter, literary critic and proponent of the "new historicism" Stephen Greenblatt counterposes his scholarly generation's desires for a "touch of the real" with an earlier generation's desire for a "touch of the transcendent." Greenblatt calls attention implicitly to the numerous ways that the *real* has, and can be, imagined: as a Newton living room or an astral plane, as something accessible to scholars or irretrievably beyond our reach. While Greenblatt's essay brings our attention to the ways that the real as an object of desire shifts from generation to generation, what continues is an ongoing desire to grasp, touch, or be touched by the really real and the fully true.

In refiguring the place of "experience" and the transcendent within our studies, we do well to keep in mind that academics' understandings of the real, the lived, and the experienced are, like Cathy's, shaped by hopes and desires. This chapter presents the very beginnings of an approach that might bring religious experiences closer to the center of our work, not as secondhand accounts, not as expressions of community culture, not as "really real" events that stand outside of time and daily life but rather as intellectually, emotionally, and politically complicated sites of wonder and imagination that dynamically shape Americans' religious lives and American scholars' evaluations of the real. Framing experience in this way, we are better positioned both to learn more about how Americans touch, and are touched by, the transcendent, and also to add a new chapter to conversations about experience that have powerfully shaped our discipline.

NOTES

1. In 2002–3 I conducted ethnographic research in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with people who practice spirituality and claim some form of mystical experience. The interviews I conducted were dense with religious experiences, and experience was a key issue in many of the events, lectures, and rituals that I attended (sometimes with interview respondents). "Cathy Morton" is a pseudonym. I have changed some of the details of her story to hide her identity, but otherwise her experience is reproduced here, as she told it to me.

2. This literature is fairly extensive. On religious experience and religious autonomy, see Taylor (1989). On experience and comparative religions, see McCutcheon (2003), Sharf (1998, 1995), King (1999), and Jantzen (1995). On experience and science, see Schmidt (2000) and Taves (1999).

3. For example, scholars who study conversion focus on how individuals constitute new "selves" by "rescripting" experiences, by some measures constituting them as different experiences in the process (Griffith 1997; Lawless 1991; Cain 1998). Other research notes how religious cultures shape bodies, emotions, and somatic expressions (Csordas 1990).

4. A strikingly similar description of religious experience arises in Wade Clark Roof 's study of spirituality in the United States (1999, 175ff.).

5. Although I do not fully articulate this history (or, rather, histories) here, a growing body of research attends to how "spiritual" experiences are embedded within and resonate with harmonial, theosophical, New Thought, and other theological strains developing in the nineteenth century. See Albanese (1992, 1999), Sutcliffe (2003), and Schmidt (2003).

6. My emphasis in this chapter is not primarily on how the experienced is emplotted but rather on how narrations are built on and through particular speech genres (Bakhtin 1981) that (in this case) orient a religious experiencer within ongoing, historically changing conversations about an experience's authenticity and its teller's truthfulness. In other words, in narrating an experience, experiencers like Cathy are simultaneously required to establish its validity to a range of socially and historically located audiences. In so doing, Cathy embeds in her narrative various rejoinders and "answers" to those who might question her. Listening to these rejoinders and her choices of genres helps us locate Cathy within particular theological streams in ways that attention to the narrative as told does not. I have further explored religious speech genres in *Heaven's Kitchen* (Bender 2003).

7. This mobilization of a "scientific" perspective resonates with the ways scientists worked out questions about the relation between religious and "scientific" phenomena throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In doing so, they contributed to developing notions of the subconscious, reevaluations of the relationship between the body and the senses, and "new" theological statements about the correspondence of heaven and earth (Taves 1999; Schmidt 2000).

8. The mediating role of tears in religious settings and the ways that tears mediate between flesh and soul are brilliantly articulated in several articles in *Holy Tears* (Patton and Hawley 2005).

9. As Proudfoot (1985) notes, the strategy of "ineffability" within works like Schleiermacher's and even the early hermeneuticists like Dilthey strove not to explicate the inexplicable but rather to put readers and listeners in a position where they too might apprehend the ineffable.

10. As I write this, I have an e-mail from Cathy open on my desktop addressed to her "brothers and sisters" at her church and copied to friends in her spiritual network. The e-mail reports that her family has taken her great-uncle off of life support, and she asks for prayers for his "smooth transition from the life of the body to the life of pure spirit. [He is] a devout Presbyterian whose faith has been his foundation through many

rocky paths. I have no doubt that he will be exultant upon his arrival in the 'after' life, as he basks in the radiance of Christ Jesus."

11. David Hall (2003) asks similar questions in a review of recent books on religious experience, including Schmidt's and Taves's.

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13

Studying Everyday Religion: Challenges for the Future

Nancy T. Ammerman

Across the pages of this book, we have met dozens of people, all of them thoroughly immersed in the world of modernity. Most are well educated, many are young, and all live at least part of their lives in high-tech, media-saturated environments in Europe and the United States. They move in and out of social settings that expect different things of them and provide them with diverse compatriots and cultural cues. Each is putting together a life out of the particular customs and histories available to them, and those histories are anything but simple.

In each case, some form of religiosity is part of the story. Few people in these pages have absorbed an all-encompassing religious way of life. But few have eliminated religion entirely, either. We began this exploration with the hunch that the usual modernization and "rational choice" variables were insufficient to explain the space between total commitment and total secularity in which we find religion today. Along the way we have raised a variety of questions about the shape of that territory. Neither "exposure to modernity" nor the range of available choices nor the "strictness" of the religious community seems to explain very much of what we have seen.

The people we have met in the field are more and less attentive to spiritual matters, but what they see and hear and do when they do pay attention is often subtly shaped by the institutions that have carried the dominant religious traditions in those places. Even intensely "personal" mystical experiences are likely to contain significant strands of image and symbol borrowed from the recognized theologies of the day. Existing traditions are by no means the only elements in people's

religious repertoire, but they are still a powerful presence. Religion seems to have a significant cultural impact beyond what can be counted by asking individuals what they believe. For instance,

- English (and Swedish) citizens retain a connection to their churches that is anything but strict. They draw on religious rituals and moral guidance when it suits them, but vicarious religious presence apparently remains worth supporting. So long as the churches have some structure of governmental and cultural support, they may not need devoted individual supporters to survive. And so long as the churches are there, a base of religious practice and identity is present in the culture.
- Italians and Spaniards are embracing individual moral authority and staying home from church (especially from confession), but they still think of themselves as Catholic, indeed, perhaps more so than ever, now that Islam provides a new religio-cultural alternative in their midst. Spain's history of connection between Church and politics, however, complicates the picture. How religious, national, and political identity can be combined varies even among the societies of Catholic southern Europe. And within the Church, the varying powers of religious leaders affect the degree to which religious experience can be linked to moral persuasion. Absent legal authority, the Church has a different range of powers at its disposal.
- Many American Jews are Jewish the way Italians are Catholic—choosing the practices and rules that will shape whatever religious life they may have, but tenaciously holding onto the identity itself. The choosing may be unorthodox, but it is still Jewish and full of ironies. Practices that are not "religious" are nevertheless interpreted with the moral and ritual structures of the tradition as a template. And identity is reinforced not by participation in a religious community but by the presence of outsiders whose contrasting cultural assumptions bring Jewishness to the fore. Religious history and cultural patterns may matter, even if the individual is neither a believer nor a member.
- Many American teenagers have no such tenacious ethnic tie to a religious tradition, but the stories of Christianity, especially evangelical tales of good and evil, still supply potent cultural resources—even when twice removed and filtered through commercial entertainment media. Many teens not only use spiritual images to talk about their lives but also resist defining themselves as secular. Even among a population far removed from active religious participation or identification, the reach of American religious and moral culture can be seen.
- Swedish youth who frequent Internet chat rooms are equally disenchanted with traditional religion and often have little or no institutional religious upbringing or participation. Their equation of religiosity with

ignorance and intolerance is so pervasive that their more religious conversation partners have a hard time defining their own faith for themselves. Again, a particular cultural and institutional history provide the terms, supplying "religious" and "enlightened" as opposing identities. Religious institutions have cultural power as that which must be rejected in order to be "religious my own way." Additionally, conversation is structured by the very particular sources of power relevant in the Internet world—access to technology and facility with words. The spiritual explorations of teens, like those of adults, are structured both by the specific social world they inhabit and by the symbols available in it.

Each of these groups tests the outer limits of religion's presence in modern lives. None conforms to what religious officials would like to see in a faithful member. They are what some sociologists would call "free riders." They contribute little to established religious organizations, if contributions are measured in time and talent and money, and they are not exemplary of the organization's goals. What we have seen, however, is that they are not beyond the reach of the cultural patterns, the rituals and stories, of the religious institutions in their societies. Nor are they unwilling to assert their own ability to create spiritual practices and engage in religious rituals. Religious identities are often maintained and negotiated in surprising places. When we look for the "strength" of religion, we need to pay attention to the everyday places where life is being navigated, as well as to the presence of cultural assumptions that keep religion widely available beyond weekly worship services. It means paying attention to individual lives and choices but recognizing the socially embedded patterns in those choices.[1]

Indeed, the people we have met in these pages have taken religion with them into a variety of places where we might not have expected to find it. Across cultures and across social settings, religious identities and practices are present in the midst of all the other social demands of everyday life. For instance:

- Transnational migrants, uprooted from the sheltering world in which their religion of birth made everyday sense, have carried that religion with them, re-creating it along the way. Neither adopting the religious ways of their destination nor leaving the homeland untouched by their experience, these migrants use religious practices and connections to navigate the journey. Religion is both a medium by which they stay connected across borders and a means for establishing a place in a world that expects everyone to have a multicultural identity. Religion moves across boundaries, but not without changing.
- Pro-life activists carry religion across boundaries, as well. Their uses of ritual symbols deliberately suggest multiple layers of meaning and thereby open up new directions for action. The logics of politics or family life are not neatly insulated from the logic of religious ritual. Just as

religious participation can suggest political action, so political participation can suggest religious commitment. Neither politics nor religion is a neatly contained variable.

- Liberal Protestant community activists have no such dramatic religious ritual language, but they too employ their religious identities in their civic action. Understanding how religion works in the civic arena, though, requires more than attention to theology or assessments of effectiveness. The question is not why or how well, but how. By speaking *from* (rather than *for*) a religious identity, they gain civic legitimacy, identifying themselves with a respected organization without presuming to impose that identity on others. By thinking of the neighborhood as a "parish," they obligate themselves to its care without imposing corresponding religious obligations on others. In an urban world full of potentially contentious differences, it is sometimes possible—though difficult—for a nonprivate religiosity to cross bridges rather than build barriers.
- In conservative Protestant families, the everyday life of the family is likely to be pervasively religious, filled with a biblically infused discourse of patriarchy and submission. Religious symbols and stories and authorities weave in and out of the stories men and women tell about their families. So if we assumed that theology is destiny, we would expect these families to act in patriarchal fashion, but they do not. Once again, we are reminded of the complexity of everyday life. Behavior and relationships are shaped by the larger cultural environment (in which egalitarian marriages are often the norm), by the multiple rhetorics available even within a given religious community, and by the contingencies of personalities and everyday demands. Each course of action (religious and otherwise) blends and negotiates the strategies at hand.

Negotiation is perhaps the dominant sociological metaphor for describing this boundary crossing. Faced with institutional and cultural pluralism, modern social actors use religious identities and symbols to make sense of everything from migration to family life to politics. In no case are other social realities absent. Economic pressures, legal requirements, political resources, even individual skills, are shaping action, but so are religious prescriptions and narratives. To say that meanings and strategies of action are being negotiated is to recognize that there are multiple and overlapping layers, including religious ones, in the modern social world. Not all situations are equally infused with spiritual options, but we would miss important dimensions in everyday action if we assumed religion's absence whenever we see secular strategies at work. Across both "public" and "private" domains, we would do well to ask both whether and how religious action may be present.

We would also do well to stretch the very definitions that guide our inquiry, recognizing that "religion" is often being produced and reshaped in places beyond existing institutions. People we have met in these excursions into the field have asked us to leave some of our preconceived notions behind. For instance:

- Those who are "reflexively spiritual" intentionally embrace the multiplicity and openness of meaning they encounter. They do not want secularists to tell them what is true any more than they want religious literalists to do so. They are adamantly open to the mysterious and spiritual dimensions of life, and not at all lacking the educational resources to navigate the modern world. Some are attached to recognized religious institutions, but others are creating alternative social spaces where new ways of being religious can be explored. Nor is this a religious sensibility that is likely to stay confined to private spaces, since the meanings they seek to construct encompass all of life.
- Dancers and gardeners may seem unlikely religious guides, but their physically embodied spiritual practices remind us again that religiosity is about more than ideas and memberships. They also remind us that religious institutions may systematically blind us to the existence of practices that are deemed illegitimate. Their practices, like so many others we have seen, cross boundaries into the mundane everyday world of food and health to make connections with sources of spiritual wholeness. These are connections much more likely to be made by people who have been outside culturally dominant groups—not only women but also people of color and people from outside the "first world." In many places the everyday world has always been infused with spiritual presence and needs no "re-enchantment."
- Americans who have individual religious experiences have long been taken at their word: that what they are doing is individualized and "spiritual" rather than religious. But the case of the woman who meets Jesus on an astral plane suggests religious traditions that shape religious individualism. It likewise reminds us that what we include in that category is not only negotiated with powerful traditional institutions, but also with scholars who study them. Immediate circles of communication and compatriots matter, but so do the scholarly "authorities" who will describe an experience for the world.

Beyond Modernity: Asking Questions about Everyday Religion

So how will we describe religion? Social science methodologies have typically described individual and collective religiosity in terms of beliefs, memberships, organizational participation, and (occasionally) experiences and practices.

Extraordinary mystical encounters and everyday spiritual presence have been the domain of anthropologists studying "premodern" people or historians describing religious virtuosi. The concerns of sociologists and psychologists have been shaped both by our theoretical preoccupation with secularization and by the survey methodology that has been our dominant epistemological technology. Written surveys almost inevitably ask about things that can easily be put in words (beliefs and common practices such as service attendance, for instance); and large-scale studies almost inevitably ask only about aspects of religion assumed to be widely present (ideas offered by the most dominant institutions, for instance). The object of our study, equally inevitably, becomes that which we can measure with the technology at hand.

These methodologies also privilege religious adherence and institutional affiliation as measures of religion's strength. Such tactics miss, however, religious movements and practices that exist outside recognized religious institutions. It also misses the power of deep religious cultural expectations or even of legal requirements and tax-generated revenue. What we have seen here is that when researchers declare that belief has declined or that affiliation is unrelated to some social outcome, only a very small part of the story is being told.

The same can be said about the so-called "strictness" debate. Rational choice theorists have used their elaborate economic modeling of survey responses, to claim that "high demand" religious movements are able to generate rewarding levels of collective religious goods that have an inherent market advantage over the low-demand habits of liberals. These high demand groups, they say, have the organizational advantage of discouraging free riders and will therefore prevail.[2] Our time in the field, observing religious groups and interviewing practitioners, however, has lead us to question the sufficiency of these market models. What we have seen in these pages is both institutional strength that comes from sources other than pooled individual commitment and religious strength that exists beyond institutional bounds entirely. Defining strong religion in terms of "strict" beliefs and practices leaves much of everyday religion unanalyzed.

Stretching the definition of religion does not mean, however, that we have adopted a functionalist stance, looking for whatever it is that provides meaning or belonging, including everything from football to ethnic pride. Each of us has tried to walk a careful line that takes into account two realities. First is the phenomenological reality of the experiences we have witnessed or heard described to us. Phenomenologically, something becomes religious because it is understood to be so by those who observe and participate in it. Sometimes the observers and participants readily agree, often because they all share common cultural assumptions. Other times definitions involve negotiation and contention.[3] Sometimes the participant is clear about what is happening, while the observer misses the religious dimension. At other times, the observer sees something of religious significance, while the participant is not so sure. Everyday practices of healing may be contentious, for instance, and Friday night

pizza may be ambiguous. Deciding whether and how either is "religious" requires the sort of negotiation that goes into navigating a complex modern world. These chapters suggest that whenever people talk about and orient their lives in ways that go beyond everyday modern rationality, when they enchant their lives by drawing on spiritual language and concepts and experiences, they are engaging in religious action.[4] Not everything is religious (or even spiritual), but when either observer or participant uses that category, social scientists should be interested in knowing why and how and to what effect.

This micro-level negotiation of meaning presumes the second of the realities we have been describing, and that is the macro-level and public context in which it takes place. Definitions of religion exist in cultural, political, historical, and legal contexts that frame what happens in everyday negotiation. Religion is not a private category, however powerful some individual transcendent experiences may be. The state often defines the limits of religion, and ethnic groups recognize some behaviors (and not others) as appropriately religious. A given culture's history may attach religious significance to declaring (or eschewing) a certain political allegiance. What an outsider may perceive as a simple act of citizenship or charity or barbarism may be deeply entwined in a religious tradition that situates that action as part of a much larger sacred story. That is, religious activity is collectively named and has a cultural reality beyond the representation and assent of any given individual.

That leaves open the question of whether any of these things that individuals and collectives name as religious have anything in common. I am inclined to think that they do, although I am well aware of the fuzziness around the edges of the category. It seems to me that religious activity is recognized as such because it has something to do with things that are sacred, transcendent, or beyond the ordinary.[5] Indeed, in much of what most people take to be religious, there are assumed to be "Sacred Others" (God or gods) at work, and the identity and history of those gods is collectively recognized and legitimated.[6] Action that is understood as religious action is typically embedded in a story about sacred realities and how human beings interact with those realities.[7] I do not assume that all human beings are inherently capable of or proficient in such interaction (i.e., "the sacred" is not a human universal), but enough are to make this a kind of human interaction worth the attention of social scientists.

Sometimes that interaction is personal and direct, but often it is indirect and routinized. The transcendent character of religious action need not directly involve a relationship with a personalized Divine Other, nor does it require individual religious "experiences." Religious institutions can represent and mediate interaction with Sacred Others without individuals having any direct encounter of their own. Institutionalized rituals, stories, moral prescriptions, and traditions are usually recognized as religious, whether or not the participants themselves think a Sacred Other is involved (or even believe Sacred Others to exist). Participating in practices that have been handed down

through a religious tradition (lighting Sabbath candles or making the sign of the cross, for instance) invokes religious narratives and experiences, whether or not the participants understand their own action to directly involve a Sacred Other. Religious action, then, becomes religious both because of its implication of Sacred Others or transcendent realities by some or all of the participants *and/or* because of its location within institutions and practices that are themselves collectively defined as religious. Indeed, these chapters have suggested that religious traditions may remain powerful even when "twice removed" or operating in a vicarious fashion. They supply a kind of cultural reservoir even for those who do not directly and routinely participate.

Elsewhere I have suggested that narrative analysis may provide us with a helpful way to think about religion (Ammerman 2003). That analysis suggests that we pay attention to characters, to relationships, to motivations, as well as to genres and to the way a plot unfolds. Like all stories, religious and spiritual stories are richly complex. They are not didactic lessons or moral recipes but are contingent accounts of how life proceeds from one point to another. They encompass experiences of body and spirit, as well as mind. Religious narratives may presume beliefs about how the world works that vary from the mundane and scientific to the wishful and fantastical. Some stories may mark the chapters of a life with ritual interruptions; others may be more or less explicit about how everyday dilemmas are to be resolved. They usually identify the fellow actors who share the story and give some of those actors more voice than others in telling it. Narratives rooted in religious traditions are also likely to offer some accounts of the way people ought to relate to each other and what their obligations are. The group telling any particular religious story may or may not include a set of propositions that are taken to be "ultimate truth," and they may or may not make unique claims about the nature of reality or the meaning of life.[8] Religious stories can take many different shapes.

In addition, because the narratives themselves are multifaceted, participants often play roles that draw on one strand of the story and not the others. That is, a person may recognize moral imperatives that have a transcendent grounding without ever having a "religious experience" or being able to articulate a set of doctrines about God. Similarly, a person may have an elaborate theology but no ongoing participation in a religious institution. Or she may identify as an Irish Catholic, with little connection to the beliefs and practices a priest might say that identity ought to entail. Rather than expecting "religion" to come in tidy bundles of well-integrated parts, what we have often seen in the cases in this book are fragments and side plots. Studying religion in today's context will require us to pay attention to the story's tangents as much as to the official plotline.

Just as we should not expect all religious stories to be about "truth," so we should not expect all religious interaction to be based on rewards. The sacred stories in which religious people participate involve relationships (human and

divine) that are full of all the joyous and anxious, mundane and ecstatic moments that characterize any relationship. Religious actors may expect that either their god or their fellow participants will provide them with rewards, but they are just as likely to tell a religious story that includes a suffering god who walks with them through the tough times in life. Recognizing the narrative quality of religious action makes clear just how impoverished rational choice assumptions are. Human action and relationships of all sorts—religious and otherwise—are about a great deal more than maximizing rewards. The relationship between human and divine is sometimes oriented toward meaning, sometimes toward belonging, sometimes toward desired rewards, sometimes toward communion (or relationship), sometimes toward ecstasy, and sometimes toward moral guidance.[9] Attempts to explain religious action that eliminate that human complexity may explain nothing at all.

These dispatches from the field have pushed us to pay attention to the many dimensions of religiosity, and we have often noted that those dimensions are not neatly bundled into an identity package. These chapters suggest that ethnic and national identities, for example, may contain religious stories, symbols, and practices, but those elements may be loosely interwoven with people's attempts to sustain or re-create a place in a world of plural cultures. Religious stories may provide identity signals that allow new forms of connection that go beyond institutional memberships. They may bridge boundaries by utilizing borrowed religious forms, or they may provide a way to claim the legitimacy of cultural difference (Warner 1997). We should neither expect that religion will always facilitate civic life and democracy nor expect that it will always stand in the way. We should not expect that religious identities will disappear in the face of pluralism, but we should ask how they are constructed and maintained and what sort of story they tell about difference and otherness (as well as what those others say about them).

The great modern problem of pluralism, then, tells us nothing very specific about religion. We can expect that most religious action in the world will take into account that other religious possibilities exist. But what people call religious, how they situate themselves relative to their own cultural traditions and identities, and whether they welcome the contributions of others are questions to be asked. Each of those questions begs for serious sociological scrutiny. What sorts of cultural and political and religious institutions engender what sorts of definitions of religion and of religious others? What sorts of social configurations are associated with religious hostility or religious indifference to pluralism, with religiously infused hospitality to strangers or spiritual embrace of plural alternatives? Which aspects of religion—physical, mental, experiential, relational, spiritual—are most easily communicated or changed or appropriated in the meeting of cultures? Having noted that modern societies place people in the midst of cultural pluralism, there is much more to know about what religion then looks like.

One of the other great "problems" of modernity is the differentiation of institutional spheres, the separation of one part of life from another. Although this sort of social complexity is as real as pluralism, we need to disentangle the structural fact of differentiation from the question of exactly where and how the boundaries between spheres are drawn. The chapters in this book have allowed us to take that question into the world of everyday interaction, asking how and under what circumstances religion escapes the pigeonholes to which modernization theories assigned it.

Thinking about the permeability of institutional boundaries has required nothing more (or less) than reexamining our understanding of the nature of social action in the modern context. I would argue (with Sewell) that modern systems always involve us in multiple solidarities, and that very fact creates the possibility of permeable institutional boundaries. No institution or group can maintain its own purity so long as individual actors are members of more than one group and can import resources and schemas ("rules" or categories of understanding) from one to another—a process Sewell (1992) calls *transposability*. The rules that tell me who I am at work are not the same rules that guide my behavior at home or at church, but no one succeeds in keeping everything perfectly separate. Which rules take precedence may be a matter of contention, with some institutional actors weighing in more heavily than others. Sociological analysis asks, then, which actors and which rules?

Importing rules from one place to another also means that human action happens in the space between predictability and improvisation.[10] We inevitably categorize what we see (if this is an X, then I do Y) and form habitual responses to typical situations. What we do is not simply automatic, but it is shaped into "settled dispositions." As we have seen, existing religious schemas have a profound ability to produce predictable "strategies of action" (Swidler 1986). But we have also seen that human actors can invoke those strategies in unpredictable ways and unlikely places. No single situation is ever completely predictable, in part because we constantly import rules and symbols from one situation into another new or unfamiliar one (cf. Bender 2003).

If all modern action involves having access to patterns from multiple social contexts, then we should not rule out the possibility that religiously formed patterns of action may find their way into situations outside the religious sphere. The task of understanding the place of religion in modern life is not the task of documenting the shrinkage (or expansion) of one institution. Our task involves, instead, a much more complicated process of attending to the presence and absence of religious action in all the spheres of society. And rather than assuming that secular factors always "trump" religious ones, we need to assess the sources of power inherent in both secular and religious patterns of action.[11] The relationship between religious and secular in society is not a zero-sum proposition. More of one does not necessarily mean less of the other, since the "pie" may simply expand or contract.

An Agenda for the Sociological Study of Religion

Once we move beyond a zero-sum model of one institution squeezing out another, we can ask much more subtle questions about the nature of the interaction that takes place across those institutional lines. We can look harder at what sorts of practices, symbols, and forms of authority shape action in any given sector of society. What kinds of social structures make religious schemas more and less welcome? And what sorts of religious organizational activity produce more and less durable and portable ways of thinking and acting? If there is active negotiation among the various schemas that might frame action in any given situation, what makes religious narratives more and less practical? What powers do religious institutions exercise, for instance, and how do secular agents take more and less effective steps to increase or decrease the prevalence of religious and nonreligious patterns of action? Our task, then, is to look at the very particular history of a given society and, indeed, of the sectors within that society. In each, we must examine both the likelihood and prevalence of religious action and the secular competitors and constraints at work.

What might that look like? If we disentangle "society" into its many different sectors, while still recognizing the permeability of the boundaries around those sectors, we might, for instance, ask questions about the presence or absence of religious elements in the domain of culture. What combination of religious and secular symbols, images, and categories is available (latent) and used (explicit) in the structuring of time, space, landscape, myth, and story? We might note, for instance, that Christian stories are interwoven with the European heritage in museums, holidays, architecture, and more (often hiding the brutality by which that cultural dominance was won). The American landscape and calendar, by comparison, have fewer explicitly religious locations that are claimed as culturewide symbols.

Still, culture production in the United States includes a wide range of both secular and sacred efforts. Clark's chapter in this book (and other work on religion and media) demonstrates the pervasiveness of religious symbols and themes, both overt and implied, in the visual images and stories of popular culture (Hoover and Lundby 1997). We do not have to look very far past the elite critics to see a world of popular culture that is saturated with religious products (McDannell 1995). Even television programs that are not intended to be "religious" are used by viewers as occasions for conversation and reflection on transcendent questions (Clark 2003). If we accept the possibility that both sacred and secular processes are at work in the production of culture, we can proceed with a more nuanced examination of the conditions under which different kinds of stories and symbols gain or lose currency. That will require paying attention to the available institutional spaces in which religious cultural experimentation takes place and who the agents of that experimentation are. What

kinds of stories gain (and retain) resonance in the culture, and how are they produced and distributed?

Religious cultural work also takes place, of course, as a culture gives collective definition to the individual life story. What are the significant moments that define who we are, and how are those moments recognized and celebrated? To what extent do people include in their biography either individual commitment to a religious tradition or personal spiritual seeking? Religious cultural resources of all sorts are available to be marshaled in the lifelong project of creating a life, but to what extent are religious organizations effective in communicating and persuading a population to use those resources? How are lifecycle events, for instance, constructed in a culture with a long history of an established church, where being baptized or buried with a religious ritual was not a matter of individual choice? How do the voluntary religious communities in the United States exercise influence over individuals, even though they lack the legal power to compel participation or the monopoly power to expect it? And, in turn, how is the story different where religion and culture are impossible to disentangle, with or without any legal powers of enforcement? The presence or absence of religious and spiritual elements in any given life story is a matter that requires careful attention to all the institutions that vie for a role and all the particular histories of relationship among them. What organizations and social settings are available, legal, and compelling at each significant moment along the way?

When we turn our attention from the cultural realm to elements of social stratification and solidarities, we can ask about the degree to which religious membership is more and less tied to political, economic, or ethnic solidarity. To what extent is a person's place in the social order linked to religious identity, and how are religious experiences and practices differentially present across lines of class and power? At least since Niebuhr (1929), American sociologists have paid attention to these "social sources," but the temptation has been to accept his theological judgment that religion tied to class or ethnicity is not real religion (which mirrors the Marxian assessment that religion is an epiphenomenon of class relations). Such evaluations should not, however, keep sociologists from continuing to ask questions about how religious and spiritual narratives intersect with stories about who belongs where and why.[12]

Questions about the nature of stratification and power stand alongside questions about religious links to other solidarities. In any given historical situation, to what extent is political membership tied to religious tradition? To what extent does national identity itself encompass religious symbols and rituals? Poland's Solidarity movement is a dramatic example of the strength of religious symbols over against an alien (secular) government (Osa 1996). The breakup of the former Yugoslavia is a similarly dramatic, if distressing, example of much the same power at work (Sells 2003). And France's seeming inability to tolerate any public religious presence illustrates that nation's historic

equation of secularity with citizenship. By contrast, where religious and political identities are less tightly coupled, either by choice or by decree (as is the case in the United States), union members or Democrats may come in many religious and secular varieties. That may, in turn, mean that certain kinds of religious public presence are less likely (that the public square is more seemingly secular) than in other national and political contexts.

And in many cases, that may be a very good thing, but that too should be an empirical question. What sorts of religious practices create social boundaries, and which build bridges? What sorts of legal and military power can be linked to religious membership without significant repression of minorities? What happens to overlapping identifications when the power and fortunes of one of the groups shift? Pace's chapter suggests that when churches are in league with repressive and unpopular states, they are likely to suffer when those repressive states lose their hold. Whether the ancien régime in France or Italy's traditional political blocs, links to political elites do not always work in religion's favor in the long term. A decline in religion may signal more about the unpopularity of political or social elites than about the implausibility of religious beliefs.

The link between religious and political identity is more subtle in a place like England, and it has long been contentious in the Catholic countries of southern Europe. Still, in recent years, the emerging European Union has discovered that Europeans think of themselves as "Christian" (something that would hardly surprise Europe's surviving Jewish minority). Throughout Europe the presence of sizable new Muslim minorities is challenging traditional links between religion (or, in the case of France, secularity) and national identity. Will Muslims be treated by the state as an ethnic minority or a religious one, each with a different set of entitlements? Can one be publicly religious and a good citizen in secular France? American Muslims face similar challenges, but the long-standing pluralism of American religion and—crucially—its disengagement from political parties and the state make the dilemmas of American Muslims somewhat less acute. Administratively and constitutionally the U.S. state may not make religion a relevant category of identity. Expanding diversity throughout the world is challenging the terms on which diverse cultures enter the public debate. In each case, the particular ways in which religion and secularity have been linked to political and national identity will color the negotiations. Is religious pluralism seen as a threat to social solidarity? The French sensibility, reflected in Durkheim's theories, closely links group membership and agreement on what is sacred. But not all histories are alike. Under what conditions might societies work out their common identity without a religious consensus?

In each of these cases, differing histories have bequeathed differing meanings to a declaration of religious identity. Religious identities and other social identities are connected in highly variable ways in today's global society, and

the boundaries among all those identities are indeed permeable. We need a much more robust understanding of the social conditions under which religious identities are deployed and the conditions under which they are suppressed or ignored. As Gorski has noted, we need a "comparative political economy of the religious sphere" (2000, 160).

That implies, of course, further attention to questions surrounding the role of religion in "public" life. A good deal of recent research has attempted to analyze the mechanisms through which religious influence is exercised in a pluralist democracy such as the United States, with its tradition of "separation of church and state."[13] It seems increasingly clear, as Casanova (1994) argued, that the crucial distinction is between wielding state power and exercising public influence. The U.S. Constitution has forbidden the former but allowed wide leeway for the latter. A wide range of religiously based public interest groups routinely seek to educate both their own members and the larger public on policies as diverse as welfare reform and foreign policy; and local congregations often provide a space in which conversations about public issues take place. Placing religion in the voluntary sector has had the ironic effect of allowing those voluntary religious communities to organize around whatever concerns them, thereby often inadvertently training and mobilizing citizens for democratic participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). And, with the relatively weak American welfare state, religious organizations also shoulder a considerable portion of the responsibility for delivering needed social services.[14] This means that religious organizations are understood in the United States to be critical players in civic and political life. They are not the only players, but neither are any other sorts of organizations.

This freewheeling participation of plural religious actors in political life stands in contrast to many other political systems around the world. On one side stands the extraordinary suppression of religious belief and participation effected by various communist regimes; at the other extreme are the religious requirements imposed by the regimes in postrevolutionary Iran. By controlling access to citizenship and to many economic rewards, states can be very powerful players in supporting or undermining religious identification, participation, and even belief. Systematic analysis of this interaction between religious and state actors is only just beginning, with the former Soviet bloc providing a fascinating natural experiment.[15]

Often closely related to questions of state power is the domain of education. The presence or absence of religion in schools has often been a matter of contention in recent years, and we are woefully ignorant of the actual social dynamics at work in classrooms and educational systems. To what extent is the knowledge presented to students religion-friendly or aggressively secularizing?[16] To what extent are religious practices and holidays accommodated and/or celebrated? How is religious pluralism talked about and experienced? What is the mix of religious schools and nonreligious ones, or does the society

expect its schools to accomplish both religious education and economic and civic schooling? We are beginning to learn something about the education that takes place within conservative religious communities,[17] but careful attention to the role of religion in everyday educational experiences is more rare. The American phobia about religion in the public schools should not prevent sociologists from asking these questions, nor should American ethnocentrism keep us from looking broadly at the experiences of societies around the world. Understanding the structural and cultural contours of education is critical to understanding the nature of religious and spiritual life today.

Understanding everyday religion will also, of course, require attention to the relationship of religion to economy. There is pretty good evidence that the rhetoric of "vocation" is fairly rare today (Scott 1999; Wuthnow 1994). Whatever role Calvinist imperatives may have had in fueling the capitalist revolution, Weber was probably right that capitalism can now propel itself along quite nicely without any religious assistance. But does that mean that there is no relationship between spiritual life and economic life, between economic institutions and religious ones? How, for instance, do the typical schedules and technologies of working life affect expectations about religious organizations? Are spiritual practices accommodated or encouraged in workplaces? Do religious organizations engage in economic activity such as job training, networking, capital accumulation, and the like? Do some religious memberships and identities open (or close) doors of opportunity? Are there "guilds" that organize people with similar religious and economic positions (Jewish architects or Catholic doctors or evangelical CEOs, for instance)? To recognize the enormous power of global capitalism is not to assume that no other social forces are at work. Shedding that assumption, sociologists can contribute significantly to an enlarged understanding of the places where economic life meets the religious and spiritual world.

Part of understanding the strength or weakness of religion's overall presence in a society clearly involves attention to all these social spheres. But it also involves attention to the actions of religious organizations themselves. The relevant questions to ask are not just about religious membership and attendance and budgets. Even high membership and attendance rates may not signal religious organizations that are capable of supporting religious action beyond their own front doors. More interesting is the question of whether religious institutions are robust creators of cultural products (symbols, stories, rituals) that can be transposed across multiple institutional lines. Do they devote significant organizational energy to nurturing and teaching their traditions? Are they vigorous social communities where bonds of solidarity are created and reinforced? Are they creative mobilizers and networkers? Do they train and support leaders who can articulate compelling visions? In short, do they cultivate religious resources that are maximally portable into the everyday worlds where their members live?

The opposite possibility presents an equally compelling set of questions. How do religious institutions contribute to their own weakness? Does a "one-size-fits-all" set of monopoly cultural practices diminish the ability to provide compelling symbols for a diverse modern population? Do religious institutions internalize rationalist critiques and scale back their reliance on extraordinary experiences and explanations, and what effects does that produce? Do religious institutions internalize modern pleas for tolerance by muting any particularistic religious claims they might wish to make? In what ways do those more generalized claims help to construct portable stories, or do they simply disappear among the pluralist alternatives? Do religious institutions dispense with solidarity-enhancing activities and encourage members to spend their time elsewhere? In other words, do religious institutions themselves act as secularizing agents that strip away the available religious resources that might be brought to bear in modern life?[18]

As these questions and comparisons suggest, there is no one summary measure of secularization or of religious strength. Looking across cultures makes clear that the relationship between religion and society is not something neatly described by one set of variables. Understanding religion will require attention both to the "micro" world of everyday interaction and to the "macro" world of large social structures. It will require attention to the way everyday habits shape behavior and to the way creative human beings exercise agency in setting new patterns. It will require that we look for the everyday intersections among the social domains of modern life and for the ways plural cultural patterns affect each other. Paying attention to how modern people identify the religious and spiritual dimensions of their lives will continue to stretch our definitions, but it will also continue to suggest new ways to think about where religion is found and why, how spiritual practices affect lives, and how the particular histories of the world's diverse societies craft the story of religion's presence and role. There are indeed many modernities—not just the Western Enlightenment story of religious decline. And there are many kinds of choices—not just the rational maximizing of rewards. Everyday religion takes place in the fascinating flow of choosing and creating that constitutes modern social life. Sociologists of religion still have a great deal left to study.

NOTES

1. Luckmann (1967) pointed us in the direction of individual, noninstitutional religiosity, as have a long line of writers about individualized and privatized religion, such as Hammond (1992) and Roof (1999). Religion outside institutions is not, however, either private or unaffected by social definitions and cultural patterns.

2. Among the many contributions to the strictness debate are Iannaccone (1994), Olson and Perl (2001), and Marwell (1996).

3. Beckford (2003) is right to point out that definitions of religion are often contentious, both for practitioners who seek public recognition and legitimacy and for scholars seeking evidence for their theories.

4. Similar arguments about religious practices are also made by Wuthnow (1998, 2001).

5. Berger (1974) argues for a substantive definition of religion that depends on the presence of a socially recognized Sacred Other (although this is my language, not his). Even Durkheim (1995), the "father" of functionalism, begins with the experience of the sacred in his definition of religion. The notion of a distinct sacred realm is also theorized by Otto (1923). Neitz and Spickard (1990) provide an important recognition that experience is at the heart of what we are trying to understand.

6. Hervieu-Léger (2000) defines religion as a way of believing that has continuity and legitimation. I am less concerned about the coherence of the meanings being produced and less willing to restrict religion to what is legitimated, but I concur with her attempt to identify the core phenomenon with ideas and actions that are based in something other than verifiable knowledge.

7. I have elaborated this argument on the nature of religious action elsewhere (Ammerman 2003). The following section draws in part on that article. Timothy Nelson (2005) provides a compelling analysis of religious ritual that takes just this sort of interactional approach.

8. As noted in the introduction, on this point I differ strongly with Stark (2001).

9. The multidimensionality of religion was theorized in the 1960s by Stark and Glock (1968), but Stark's recent work has concentrated on the need for otherworldly explanations and supernatural rewards.

10. This, of course, is the basic theoretical position that comes from symbolic interactionism (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1959; Mead 1934). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) point to the human ability to bring past, present, and future into play at any given moment and to choose which "past" is the relevant one.

11. This is akin to Gorski's (2000) argument that "secularization" (the differentiation of religious from other institutions) may or may not be related to decreases in individual religiosity. Change at one level does not tell us what will happen at the other level.

12. Some of the best work in this area has been done on the new immigrant churches. One might argue that they define an ethnoreligious space for their members (Warner 2005). It is often the case that congregations become primary community centers for an immigrant community (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). We do not yet know whether this linkage will survive into subsequent generations. We do know that America's entrenched legacy of racism makes the black churches unique (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

13. See, for example, Wuthnow and Evans (2002) on mainline Protestants, Smith (2000) on white evangelicals, and Smidt (2003) on the clergy. Demerath (2001) provides an excellent comparative study of the issue.

14. On social service delivery, see Cnaan (2002), as well as the important cautions voiced by Chaves (1999).

15. Studies of post-Soviet changes include Crnic and Lesjak (2003), Pollack (2002), and the work of Froese (2004a, 2004b, 2005).

16. On the history of the secularization of education, see the studies reported by Smith (2003).

17. Some of the most interesting research is actually on home schooling (Bates 1991; Stevens 2001).

18. This is a reality recognized very early by Berger (1969).

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