Sacred Ties:

Why Religion Inspires Confidence, Community, and Sacrifice

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Abstract

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Explaining group solidarity is one of the most fundamental problems of sociology. Understanding solidarity within religious groups is particularly challenging because much of what religion offers cannot be verified in an empirical context and must be believed to have value. The main purpose of this study is to posit and test a theory of religious group solidarity that merges key principles from cultural theories of religion and the rational choice paradigm. Specific doctrinal content is identified as being solidarity-producing and it is argued that the amount of confidence group members have in such doctrines will impact their willingness to sacrifice on behalf of the group. The role of families and religious groups in sustaining confidence in religious explanations was also considered. Evidence was found for hypotheses asserting that religious confidence is promoted in teenagers as the expressions of confidence of others are observed, emotional experiences are connected to supernatural sources, and the efficacy of religious doctrine is experienced. Additionally, affiliation, donation and service to the group were found to be

positively influenced by higher levels of confidence in the existence of heaven, stronger belief in the exclusive right of a religion to offer salvation, more certainty that God is directly involved in one's personal life, as well as the promotion of easily detectable outward practices, socially encapsulating rules, and inimitable religious capital. These findings suggest that the impact of religious cultural content and belief should be more seriously considered in studies of religion and group solidarity. It is also proposed that the principles outlined can be applied to more secular groups and behaviors. Methodologically, the framework presented calls for more frequent and effective measures of religious confidence.

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DEDICATION

To the love of my life Patty, and to Craig, Kavyn, Bethany, Saydee and Brian who gave me the motivation and the inspiration to finish this project.

Chapter 1: The Problem of Sacrifice

In 1945 Communist leaders in Romania called to order the Congress of Cults, where one by one various religious leaders expressed their support for the new regime. Troubled by some of the sympathetic statements made and knowing he was putting his life at risk, Reverend Richard Wurmbrand reminded the 4,000 other delegates that it was their duty to glorify God alone. Thus began his turbulent relationship with the Communist government. In 1948, Reverend Wurmbrand was abducted by the secret police on his way to church. He spent the next eight years in prison. While there he experienced unspeakable abuse and witnessed the savage killings of several other religious prisoners.

Upon his release in 1956, Reverend Wurmbrand promptly returned to his ministry and within a week was ordered to stop preaching. Despite these threats and his intimate understanding of the torment and cruelty he would experience for his defiance, Reverend Wurmbrand continued to build the underground church. In 1959, he was again arrested and sentenced to 25 years in prison for teaching doctrines contrary to Communist ideals.

As the result of international pressure and for a ransom of $10,000, Reverend Wurmbrand was released in 1964. In total, he spent over 14 years in prison, three of them in solitary confinement. Soon after his release, he was convinced by other underground church leaders to leave Romania to become an international spokesman for their cause (torturedforchrist.com). On Friday May 6, 1966, he stood before a subcommittee of the United States Senate to testify about the malicious persecution

he had endured. He related the following about his state of mind in prison after suffering years of torture, attempted brainwashing, and psychological trauma:

> "I believed also that nobody is more a Christian. I had read in the Bible that there will be in the last time the great apostasy, that people will leave the faith and I believed that I lived now this time. But I said to myself if Christianity is dead, I will sit at its tomb and will weep until it arises again, just as Mary Magdalene sat at the tomb of Jesus and wept until Jesus showed Himself." (Wurmbrand 1966)

During his darkest hour and despite the terrible price he had paid for his faith, Reverend Wurmbrand remained steadfast.

Two years after Reverend Wurmbrand testified before the United States Senate, and over 5800 miles away, Mohamed Atta was born to a successful Egyptian lawyer. After earning a bachelor's degree in architecture from Cairo University in 1990, Atta left for Germany to do graduate work in urban studies at the Technical University of Hamburg. It was during this time in Germany that Atta's moderate religiosity developed into Islamic fundamentalism. With this change, Atta became fully committed to ending what he believed to be the West's humiliation of the Islamic world.

After spending several months in Afghanistan for training purposes, Atta flew to the United States, where in the spring of 2000 he began attending flight school. He completed his flight training a year later. On September 11th 2001, Atta boarded American Airlines Flight 11 intent on using the plane to cause as much

damage as possible to the United States. Knowing it would end his life, he personally rammed the plane into the north tower of the World Trade Center just before nine o'clock in the morning. That day, through the actions of Atta and eighteen other attackers willing to die for their cause, almost 3,000 people were killed and billions of dollars worth of economic damage was done (Wikipedia 2008).

Although thousands of accounts of individuals willing to make *extreme* sacrifices to promote collective ends fill the pages of history, most demonstrations of religious group solidarity occur in the day-to-day lives of average people. The biblical story about the poor widow giving money to the church when she could not afford to is one of many such examples. Indeed, in the United States, one need not stop too many people on the street before finding an individual who has given a substantial portion of his energy, income, and/or time to his religious group. The commonness of these occurrences compels us to wonder why some individuals knowingly and willingly surrender their own physical, social, and material welfare to benefit a religious group.

The Problem

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the causes of variation in religious group solidarity. *Religious group solidarity* exists to the extent that members contribute to and support their religious group and its members. The problem of group solidarity is of central concern to sociologists. While it is clear that millions of individuals are prepared to pay considerable personal costs in order to establish and promote collective ends, explaining why has been challenging since the

dawn of the discipline. Of course, no one would argue with the fact that a religious group's capacity to survive and shape the social world in an advantageous way is entirely dependent on its ability to convince individual members to contribute. However, while some religious groups seem to have plenty of members who are willing to sacrifice a great deal on behalf of the group, there are many groups whose members seem much less willing. Why?

Explaining variation in religious group solidarity can be extremely difficult because much of what religious adherents claim to be receiving from their groups is not empirically detectable. Few people have trouble comprehending the motivation for seeking out money or friendship, but explaining why people do things for deities, spiritual enlightenment, or salvation is extraordinarily challenging because it requires an understanding of individuals who have a conviction that things that cannot be empirically measured are really there. Indeed, the problem of belief and the uncertainty inherent in religion has been somewhat of a thorn in the side of religious theory, and several criticisms have been raised in regard to this issue (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Montgomery 1992).

Historically, there has been no shortage of individuals who have been willing to accept costly obligations for the sake of beliefs they could never empirically rationalize to others. Persecuted prophets, religious warriors, suicide bombers, spiritual hermits, avid tithe payers and other devout religious participants might all have a difficult time explaining their actions in terms of what Weber calls means-end instrumentality ([1914] 1978). Indeed, it is virtually impossible to identify

empirically benefits received by Reverend Wurmbrand and Mohamed Atta that would justify the costs they paid.

While religious belief can be a factor motivating and guiding individual, social, political, and even economic action, it must be at the center of any effective explanation of religious action (Montgomery 1996). Of course, it is true that faith is not the only thing driving the acceptance of religious obligations. However, the refusal to acknowledge religious conviction as an important variable denies the impact of the defining characteristic of religious believers—their belief. Indeed, to the scholar who is interested in understanding the origin of belief and its impact on group solidarity, it is only natural to turn to a study of religious groups.

Religious groups, by definition, offer explanations about the world that rely on supernatural assumptions (Stark and Finke 2000). Because their doctrines are extensively dependent upon the existence of forces or entities beyond or outside the known empirical realm (Stark 2004), the success of religious groups depends largely on their ability to convince people that those forces are real. Clearly, doctrines about the supernatural can have no impact unless individual members believe in them. Thus, for a religious group to *claim* it has access to supernatural resources is not enough to compel its members to accept any costly obligations or sacrifice for the group. To be offered salvation is not the same as believing you will actually obtain it.

Unfortunately, while it seems easy to find individuals who are sure that they will receive unseen benefits by offering up their recognizable social and material interests to their religions, it is difficult to find social scientific research that

effectively explains *and* empirically verifies the origin and impact of religious belief and the variation in individual and group confidence in those beliefs. Yet, even the casual observer knows that some individuals are more confident in their religious claims than others and some religious groups seem to be better than others at fostering confidence in the explanations they offer. What causes this variation? Where does confidence in religious explanations come from, and what are the characteristics of groups whose members have high levels of religious confidence? How and why does belief influence religious group solidarity?

PAST APPROACHES

Although a widely accepted and satisfying solution to the problem of group solidarity has yet to be uncovered, some progress has been made. Durkheim, for example, stressed how common religious culture has the capacity to motivate individuals to forgo their self-interests in pursuit of group ends ([1912] 2001; 1933). Religious groups are cohesive because their members possess a common allegiance to social norms and traditions. To the extent that these rules and ideals are internalized and viewed as legitimate, they produce social order. Without them, there would be chaos.

Religious rites function to reinforce these bonds of social solidarity. Ritual activities produce social electricity or effervescence, which results in groups identifying objects with the feeling. Such objects come to be viewed as sacred, or set apart, and in turn become symbols of the group and the basis of social classification. Distinguishing what is pure and sacred from the "dirt" serves to establish identity

and maintain the group by giving it the power to include or exclude (Douglas 1966). This allows the group to recognize itself and distinguish itself from other communities.

Collective effervescence further acts to strengthen common ideals, beliefs, and attitudes and instill them in group members. This gives them a shared understanding of the world and a common sense of morality. When internalized, the "collective conscience" is so persistent and powerful that it presents individuals in society with few opportunities to deviate from group norms. In this way, religion creates a society in which "the individual is not his own master" (Durkheim 1933). To Durkheim, the content of what is believed is less relevant. Indeed, he argues that there is no difference between rituals celebrating the life of Christ and a commemoration celebrating a great event in national life. Both forms of religion produce solidarity by "upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality" ([1912] 2001).

Durkheim's exploration of how a shared reality can promote solidarity was an important contribution to the study of religion. Still, many questions are left unanswered. For example, Durkheim offered few insights into why some cultures generate greater individual contributions to group ends than others. If actors are inevitably shaped by religious culture without being fully aware of it, what makes members of some groups more or less likely to deviate from the dominant cultural

themes presented to them? Why do some objects ultimately become defined as sacred while others do not?

Durkheim also identified effervescence as being the result of a collective process. However, it is known that religious emotion can be experienced by individuals in the absence of others (Newberg, D'Aquil, and Rause 2001). Consequently, the mechanism of "collective effervescence" needs to be reevaluated. When will collective ritual produce a collective emotional response? Under what conditions will emotional experiences occur, and when will they advance collective religious ends? What is the role of the group in shaping individual emotional experience? When will emotional experiences be more or less likely to facilitate the internalization of religious culture, and which particular aspects of that culture serve to promote group solidarity?

Drawing and building upon Durkheim, cultural-evolutionary theorists have attempted to explain variation in religious group solidarity by viewing it as a byproduct of cultural evolution. Wilson (2002) argues that some cultural mutations that occur build group cohesiveness while others do not. He defines a cultural mutation as "a new belief or practice that arises in one group by chance, rational thought, or any other process" (2002:35). From this perspective, religious groups form in order to obtain resources that can only be acquired through collective action. Over time, it turns out that some religions feature cultural elements that are more conducive to survival than others. Religious communities that feature adaptations that promote cooperation and the pursuit of group ends over individual ones will

persist. Thus, Wilson explains that groups "of people who abandon self-will and work tirelessly for a greater good will fare very well as a group" (175). Accordingly, variation in religious group solidarity can be explained in terms of cultural group selection. Religious groups that mutate in ways that are adaptive will be strongest.

While it is obvious that variations in religious group solidarity are indeed the result of both random and intended cultural mutations, cultural-evolutionary theory neglects some important questions. For example, which adaptations will result in religious group survival and which will result in a weakened group, and why? How can we predict which religions will survive and which will die? Obviously, mechanisms that produce solidarity are adaptive, but what kind of adaptations are mechanisms that produce solidarity?

If religious group solidarity is the product of a selection process, what, if any, is the role of the individual actor? While it is true groups that effectively produce collective goods should survive, cultural-evolution theory ignores well-established collective action problems. What compels individuals to contribute to group ends in the first place? What happens when they choose not to contribute or to free ride? Ultimately, the idea that only those religious groups that happen to have characteristics that promote solidarity will survive is quite unsatisfactory and does not help us understand how functional adaptations develop, why they produce solidarity, or why individual actors adhere to them.

Fortunately, some considerable advances in the discussion about the relationship between ritual, culture and solidarity have been made. Drawing upon the

work of Thomas Schelling ([1960] 1980), David Lewis (1969), and Robert Aumann (1974), Chwe emphasizes the importance of cultural practices, particularly public rituals, in the production of common knowledge (2001). Where common knowledge is effectively generated, it can be used as a resource to solve coordination problems thus increasing the probability that individuals will conform to community standards.

Interestingly, while Chwe believes it is necessary to consider the content of cultural practices, he largely ignores emotion and bases his argument on "cold rationality" (2001:4). Additionally, he fails to outline the mechanisms by which some cultural content influences social outcomes. In the end, there is no reason to believe that simply because a "rational ritual" is presented, people will *believe* in the common information provided and actually conform.

In contrast to Chwe's analysis, Randall Collins' work on interaction ritual chains focuses almost exclusively on emotion. He affirms that variations in ritual intensity can produce variations in social membership patterns and the ideas that accompany them (2004). He, like Durkheim, believes that ritual interaction produces emotional energy, but unlike Durkheim, Collins addresses individual motivation. He argues that individuals make strategic choices in pursuit of emotional energy and will continue with interactions that yield the best emotional payoff. In this way, Collins acknowledges individual choice without ignoring the impact of larger social patterns.

Collins argues that successful social rituals make people feel confident, strong, and motivated, which increases their emotional energy (EE), which can be

turned into outcomes. Conversely, ineffective rituals or being an outsider to social rituals can have the opposite effect. In fact, if participation in specific interaction rituals stops, then the beliefs associated with them will tend to lose their emotional importance and will gradually become meaningless (2004:39). Consequently, it is the stratification of emotional energy that determines social structure and differential power.

From Collins' perspective, some religious groups have higher levels of solidarity than others because participants receive greater amounts of emotional energy. But, what is it about some groups that results in greater energy production? How can that be predicted and measured? Unfortunately, like Durkheim, Collins fails to acknowledge the role of cultural content in the production of emotional energy. How does the substance of an interaction influence its ability to produce certain outcomes? Does just any shared reality work, or are some ideological perspectives more conducive to promoting solidarity than others? Indeed, sometimes common knowledge produces conflict which extinguishes group solidarity.

In his work, Hechter (1987) critiques cultural explanations of group solidarity in two important ways. First, he claims these approaches do not effectively account for differences in the extensiveness of obligations groups place on their members. Second, he argues that they do not explain when group members will actually comply with these obligations. For rational choice theorists, religious group solidarity is a problem of incentives and control. Rational actors will contribute to group ends only as long as they believe it is in their best interests to do so. Whenever

possible, they will try to obtain the benefits offered by the group without paying the costs (Olson 1965). Thus, in order to prevent this kind of free riding, religious groups must find ways to convince their members to fulfill group commitments.

Hechter identifies dependence and control as the primary causal mechanisms of group solidarity (1987). He predicts that solidarity will be greatest in groups where member dependence is maximized *and* efficient formal controls, which include the capacity to monitor actions and sanction rule-breakers, are in place. Hechter suggests that actors voluntarily join groups to gain access to goods that they cannot obtain outside of the group. As a condition of being supplied with the good, all members of a group are expected to accept certain obligations. But, why would people choose to join a religious group that places extensive obligations on them? Hechter's answer is that the people who join must believe the benefits associated with the good being offered are worth the costs of accepting the obligations. Thus, the "key determinant[s]" of the extensiveness of obligations group members are willing to accept, or group solidarity, is the degree to which they depend on the group for a desired good (1987:45-46) and the ability of the group to find cost-effective ways of insuring their members are fulfilling their obligations, thus preventing free-riding (Olson 1965).

While Hechter's theory of group solidarity helps us better understand the extent to which religious group members will comply with group rules and contribute to group ends, he neglects many of the valuable insights of cultural theory. Indeed, his theory can be difficult to apply to religious groups because it focuses

almost exclusively on utilitarian ends, while many religious goods are immanent or must be believed in to have value (Hechter 1997).

In contrast, the religious economies approach acknowledges that actors, within their framework of understanding, apply rational means to achieve empirically unverifiable, religious ends. Central to the religious economies approach is the idea that within a religious market place, religious firms seek to attract converts by providing compelling religious and social rewards (Stark and Finke 2000). Religious goods are "produced, chosen and consumed" just like other commodities (Sherkat and Ellison 1999), and religious firms must compete with other groups for members. By offering otherworldly rewards such as life after death and salvation, religious groups are able to sustain more intense and lasting commitments—or achieve a greater degree of solidarity—than secular groups that are incapable of offering such incentives.

However, otherworldly incentives cannot sustain commitment unless people believe in them. Thus, Stark and Finke emphasize that confidence is the fundamental problem for religion (2000). While they do mention that observing expressions of confidence of others, participating in rituals and prayer, and emotional experiences can all produce confidence in religion, they do not fully explore the specific mechanisms through which confidence impacts religious group solidarity. Furthermore, while the religious economies approach convincingly addresses the importance of individual choice in religious exchange, it largely overlooks the

contributions of cultural theorists who emphasize the ways in which religious choices are socially embedded (Sherkat 1997).

Opponents of rational choice argue that theorists who have dismissed culture and subjectivity have made "serious mistakes" (Alexander 1998:96). Wilson (2002) submits that human choice is more complex than just weighing the costs and benefits and calls for sociologists to rethink the rational choice psychology. Alexander agrees that there is "much more complexity to the relationship between ends and means than rational actor models allow" (1998:157), and that "one-sidedness has created debilitating contradictions within both the micro and macro traditions" (p. 164). He supports a theoretical direction that views action as an exercise of agency "through, not against culture" (p. 220). Collins (1997) has rightly argued that the rational choice model of religion had been too quick to dismiss the insights of Durkheim. He believes that the theory can be "strengthened by revision in the direction of more explicit treatment of ritual-emotional mechanisms of social solidarity" (163).

Some research on religious capital has tried to compensate for these oversights (Froese and Pfaff 2005; Finke 2003; Sherkat 2001; Stark and Finke 2000; Sherkat 1997; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Iannaccone 1990). Drawing upon discussions of human, social, and cultural capital, Iannaccone sought a way to "explain patterns of religious beliefs and behavior, over the life-cycle, between generations, and among family and friends" (Iannaccone and Klick 2003:6). Essentially, he wanted to construct a better way of dealing with the question of why people's cultural upbringing seems to shape their current religious preferences so

considerably. He argued that as individuals increase their level of input to the production of a particular religious culture, their satisfaction with it increases, as does the cost of switching to another tradition. This increases religious group solidarity by providing significant incentives for people to remain with the group in which they were raised (1990).

Montgomery has found the religious capital approach to be unsatisfying. He has responded to it by showing how the alternative micro-foundations inherent in cognitive dissonance theory can also account for low interdenominational mobility and can better account for religious belief (1992). A child who doesn't believe in God but is escorted to church by a parent is faced with two conflicting cognitions. This creates painful dissonance that will most likely be resolved by the child coming to believe in God. To keep dissonance to a minimum, an individual will continue in the religious traditions of the parents into adulthood. Montgomery supposes that the religious capital approach works, at least in part, *because* of underlying mechanisms suggested by dissonance theory (1996). He recommends a theoretical strategy that distinguishes between religious beliefs and religious preferences and insists it must provide a compelling explanation of belief formation.

While cognitive dissonance theory does address some key weaknesses of the religious capital approach (Montgomery 1997; Montgomery 1992), its limitation is that, while it does predict individuals will seek to reduce cognitive inconsistencies, it says little about how exactly they will do it. Each individual has a myriad of options, according to the theory. In general, it has been argued that attitudes will change

before behaviors (Cooper 2007; Festinger and Carlsmith 1959; Festinger 1957). At some level, this makes sense. People see your behaviors, but not your attitudes. Consequently, behavioral change is likely to come under more criticism than a privately held attitude. In other words, it could be argued that the costs associated with changing an attitude are lower than those incurred by changing a belief. Unfortunately, there is still no consistent way of predicting exactly how dissonance will be reduced or knowing exactly what is going on in the black box of the brain to cause dissonance (Cooper 2007). Under the cognitive dissonance model, it would be very tricky to predict when dissonance will promote group solidarity and when it will drive an individual to leave the group, though we can be sure one of the two will occur.

Unfortunately, the religious capital approach fails to address many of the same issues. Which types of religious capital investment will facilitate a stronger attachment to the group and why? How does the doctrinal content and organization of a religious group influence religious capital investment? How does religious capital relate to religious belief, and what implications does this have for our understanding of the differential effectiveness of religious socialization?

Despite the considerable progress that has been made, there is still much work to be done before we will have a comprehensive explanation of religious group solidarity. Each approach to the issue brings something important to the debate. Cultural and psychological approaches have provided persuasive accounts of the impact of emotion and the larger cultural context on religious belief and practice.

The religious economies approach and the accompanying concept of religious capital have yielded some compelling empirical results by taking the problems of religious exchange and doctrinal content seriously. Still, the new paradigm is in need of a more convincing set of microfoundations that examine the effect of rituals and religious training in creating individual confidence and cultural attachment. Furthermore, there is a general need to explain the mechanisms by which religious groups foster and utilize religious emotion and member confidence to produce collective goods.

A New Approach

As demonstrated by the brief examples outlined above, there is tremendous variation in the ways in which group solidarity manifests itself. Reverend Wurmbrand peacefully defied the Communists and was prepared to endure torture and even death rather than cease his religious preaching. Because of his commitment, Mohamed Atta was willing to kill himself in order to harm his perceived enemy. Of course, more commonly, commitment might drive an individual to donate money or time to her group. Clearly, these demonstrations of solidarity vary in purpose, intensity, and distinctiveness. Notwithstanding, I intend to argue that the underlying causal mechanisms driving individuals to engage in *all* of these types of group-promoting behaviors are essentially the same.

Fundamental to my approach is the assertion that primary desires do not necessarily motivate religious behavior. Rather, it is often the case that religion forms the basis of our secondary desires, or our "desires about our desires" (Smith

2003:9). There is no need to assume that religious individuals experience no inner resistance to their outward actions and attitudes. A teenager, for example, might instinctually want to be sexually active. He might strongly desire the sexual experience, but refuse to act on his instinct because of his religious beliefs. Likewise, a woman might donate money to her church because she believes it is required by God even when she really would like to spend it on herself.

It seems reasonable to assume that internal struggles accompany most adherents to religious principles. So, why are some of them so willing to sustain, promote, and conform to their groups, while others are less willing? Why are members of some groups more likely to pursue group ends over their individual desires? I submit that in order to effectively answer these questions, a theoretical approach must explain the impact of specific religious cultural content, the origins of the confidence individuals have in it, and how content and confidence interact to produce individual sacrifice for the group.

Whether or not group members think their religion requires significant sacrifice to obtain the benefits they are seeking is almost entirely determined by the *content* of the doctrines presented to them. In order to maximize solidarity, cultural content must have implanted within it effective means of generating member dependence on the group and preventing widespread defection from cultural principles (Stark 2004; Hechter 1987). In the following chapters I will explore several types of religious doctrines that I predict have implications for religious group solidarity. Some of these serve to maximize the potential for solidarity by

increasing member dependence, while others enhance solidarity by reducing the cost of formal control (Hechter 1987).

While doctrine has the capacity to influence the level of solidarity a religious group can achieve, it does not have that power in and of itself. In fact, the content of a group's theology only determines what group members are *expected* to believe and do; it may not be a powerful predictor of what they *actually* believe and do. While it is very important, *compelling doctrinal content alone does not enhance religious group solidarity*. Thus, essential to the approach presented here is the idea that religious culture and the doctrines it supports only have an impact to the extent that members have confidence in their legitimacy and truthfulness. Thus, as Stark puts it, "the universal problem of religion is one of *confidence*" (2001:177), and ultimately, it is not simply whether or not people believe in these types of religious explanations that influences them, but rather what matters is how strongly they believe.

In short, effective religion is largely a function of uncertainty reduction (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1995; Montgomery 1992). To the extent that religious groups can strengthen member belief, they reduce member uncertainty about outcomes (as long as the content of belief declares certainty). If members come to have "no doubts" that certain principles and doctrines are true, then the risk associated with living according to those principles is eliminated. For example, to the church member who knows salvation awaits those who donate 5% of their income to the church, donating is not risky. In their mind, salvation is a sure thing, and it only cost them 5%. On the other hand, to the doubtful affiliate, there is

always a chance that giving up the money will yield no return. As long as they have doubts, the likelihood they will give should be diminished. In the end, my argument is probabilistic, rather than deterministic. The more certain members are of their beliefs, the more likely they will be to act consistently with them.

If confidence is the universal problem of religion, then the universal problem for those seeking to understand religion is explaining where confidence comes from and how it impacts individual and group behavior. Accordingly, I will explore the conditions under which an individual will develop more or less confidence in religious explanations and specify the conditions under which that confidence will promote solidarity. While previous research focuses primarily on the presence or absence of belief, mine will focus on the intensity or level of certainty associated with belief.

I will argue that individuals who are convinced that religious explanations offered by their religion are right will be more likely to comply with them *despite what else they might desire*. Strong belief in religious doctrines is a key mechanism for overcoming primary desires and establishing religious preferences consistent with the culture of a particular group. To have solidarity, a religion need not be full of members who always *want* to sacrifice for the group or who somehow irrationally do not perceive the personal costs of their religiosity. Rather, solidarity will accompany any group whose members are convinced that they *must* sacrifice in order to obtain desired benefits and blessings.

By considering the issue of confidence more fully, I hope to socially embed the religious believer in a way that is more compelling than what contemporary rational choice theories offer. By so doing, I hope to address many of the criticisms that have been waged against the new paradigm. Ultimately, this should better establish the mechanisms by which beliefs are engendered and reinforced and provide a more convincing explanation of how and why beliefs matter in the production of religious group solidarity. I hope that by acknowledging and integrating the strengths of their various theoretical viewpoints, I can effectively build a bridge between cultural and psychological theories and the new paradigm in the sociology of religion.

SYNOPSIS

In the following chapter, I outline a theory of religious group solidarity. Specifically, I examine the causal mechanisms that produce higher or lower levels of religious group solidarity and effective intergenerational religious transfer. I explain how confidence in religious explanations is instilled and explore the impact that this confidence can have on individual and group behavior. In building this theoretical approach, I attempt to link group development back to the cultural and ritual practices that scholars have identified in religion (Durkheim [1912] 2001; Collins 1997), while at the same time allowing room for individual choice within a religious marketplace. I argue that the likelihood that people will adopt certain elements of religious culture depends on the nature of their individual religious interactions, which are shaped by the broader cultural context in which they exist. Drawing on

these insights, I will provide what I hope is a more comprehensive explanation of why some religious cultures are more capable than others of producing individuals who are highly committed to contributing substantial personal resources, which could otherwise be used to maximize their own individual welfare, to their religion.

Guided by the theory presented in chapter two, chapter three uses data collected from 3,370 American teenagers and their parents to empirically explore how parental influence and religious practice in the home and in general impact the religious confidence of teenagers in the United States. Therein, I treat religious confidence as a dependent variable and examine and discuss how certain aspects of religious culture can serve to promote individual religious confidence. Specifically, I evaluate hypotheses that predict that the reliability and trustworthiness of expressions of religious confidence in the home and at church, as well as personal religious experience, have a positive impact on the strength of teenage religious belief. Theoretically, I try to outline the implications of these findings for the secularization paradigm and provide several suggestions for future research.

Chapter four uses the Baylor Religion Survey (2005) of 1,721 adults to examine the relationship between having confidence in specific religious doctrines and member willingness to donate to, serve, and promote their religious groups. Chapter five applies several key theoretical propositions to examine the declining rates of affiliation with Judaism in the United States. Using the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) completed in 1990, I show that the retention rates of Judaism are considerably higher on the East Coast then on the West Coast. I then

conduct a comparative analysis to determine whether or not the differences between the two coasts that might account for the disparity are consistent with patterns suggested in the theory.

In the concluding chapter, I briefly explore the ability of my theory to account for instances of extreme sacrifice. I specifically discuss groups that use suicide bombing and explore how they implement the confidence-building characteristics I identify in religion. I also explore the particular advantages religion provides in facilitating sacrifice by briefly examining the attempt by the Soviet Union to sustain solidarity without it. Finally, I revisit how the social microfoundations of religion that I explore create a more solid theoretical basis for the new paradigm in the sociology of religion and provide several suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: A Theory of Religious Group Solidarity

The fact that religion has the capacity to motivate individuals to surrender their private resources to secure group ends is manifest in everything from tithe paying and volunteer work to the Crusades and the tragic events of September 11th. However, between religious organizations there is much variation in the degree to which members are willing to make sacrifices for the group. When it comes to producing solidarity, not all religions are created equal. The purpose of this chapter is to identify and explore the underlying mechanisms that produce this disparity.

Variation in levels of religious group solidarity can be measured along three distinct dimensions. The first dimension is *affiliation.* This relates to the individual's willingness to identify with and belong to the group. Accordingly, religious groups that effectively retain their members over time will be considered as having higher levels of solidarity than groups with poor retention rates. Since claiming to be affiliated with a group typically requires little or no substantial effort from members, it can in most cases be considered the weakest expression of solidarity.

The second dimension of religious group solidarity is *donation.* This includes any physical, material, or monetary resources individuals contribute to or use for the benefit of their religious group. The proportion of the group that contributes and the quantity of contributions are both important aspects of this dimension. Groups that receive larger donations from a greater proportion of their membership will be considered as having higher levels of solidarity.

Service is the third dimension of religious group solidarity. It refers to the amount of time and labor individuals voluntarily invest (without wage compensation) in support of the group or its members. Like donation, this relates to both the quantity of time and labor contributed and the proportion of individuals willing to contribute. Religious organizations with high percentages of members spending significant portions of time volunteering will be considered as having a high degree of solidarity.

Understanding variations in member willingness to remain affiliated with, donate to, and serve their respective religious groups is the major concern of this chapter. What is it that makes some individuals more willing than others to sacrifice their personal resources to their religious group? Why are some religious groups better than others at convincing their members to exhibit solidarity? How do beliefs, doctrines, emotions, rituals, and rational thinking intersect to produce these variable outcomes at both the individual and group level?

A Starting Point

Hechter (1987) identifies dependence and control as the primary causal mechanisms that account for member willingness to accept costly commitments and keep them. To the extent that members depend on a group, they will be willing to pay higher costs. One way member dependence on the group can be understood is in terms of the costs of exiting the group. The higher the exit costs, the more dependence there is on the group. Several factors contribute to the cost of exiting a group, thereby increasing or diminishing dependence. The first factor Hechter

identifies is whether or not there are any close substitutes. If there are several groups offering similar goods, then individuals are less dependent on any particular one of them (1987).

Another factor Hechter (1987) argues will influence the level of dependence on the group is the amount of information available about alternatives. If members of a given group are unclear that there are other groups that can offer them the desired good, or if they are unaware of the unique benefits another groups might offer, then naturally, they will depend more on the group about which they do know. Cost of moving is another aspect of dependence. Even if many other groups that supply the desired good do exist and individuals know about them, the transaction cost associated with leaving the current group and joining a different one may be too high. Lastly, strong personal ties to other members of a group also increase dependence. Hechter states that "[s]ociability is one of the most important immanent goods that groups provide" (1987:47). Therefore, by leaving the group, people may also be leaving social ties in which they have invested much time and energy.

While Hechter's explanation of group solidarity provides some pieces of the solidarity puzzle, he and others focus almost exclusively on the material and social incentives driving human dependence on groups. If this was all that drives human behavior, we might be able to stop here and feel the question of solidarity is answered. Unfortunately, this is simply not the case. Still, by identifying dependence as a mechanism essential to the development of solidarity, Hechter provides a good starting point for the discussion of religious group solidarity. His model suggests that

the reason why members of some religious groups accept more costly obligations relates to the nature and strength of their dependence on the group. But, what do religious affiliates depend on religious groups to obtain?

People depend on religious groups to gain access to a variety of goods and services. Some religions offer rain, fertility, or a good harvest. A few supply temporal assistance in the form of food, clothing, and money. All provide the sociality benefits that come from being part of a group. Clearly, most religions offer many of the material and social benefits that tend to be the focus of sociological research. Some researchers have even claimed that the fundamental reason individuals contribute to religious groups is to obtain these kinds of secular goods. From this perspective, religious groups "serve as conduits for a variety of secular privileges (e.g. social support, access to mating markets, daycare, and economic activities), and social ties to co-religionists provide solitary incentives for participation in religious organizations" (Sherkat and Ellison 1999: 381).

While no one can deny that individuals obtain secular rewards from religious groups, the desire to obtain them seems an insufficient motivation for many of the costly sacrifices people make on behalf of religion. Even if high religious commitment in the form of service and contribution is viewed as an insurance policy against some future time when the believer may need some of the same assistance, it is often a very bad deal. Can a wealthy Latter-day Saint (Mormon) who gives over 10% of his income to the church for just a few years ever expect to recoup even a fraction of that amount in future assistance? Likewise, will a Jehovah's Witness who

goes door to door seeking out converts for 40 hours a month for 10 years ever have the group invest that much time serving her needs? Typically, the answer is no. While in some cases the give-and-take might be proportional, the vast majority of highly committed religious individuals will never get back anything of worldly value that is remotely comparable to what they put into the group, nor would they expect or demand such a refund.

Furthermore, many if not all of the social and material goods being offered by religious groups can be acquired by joining any number of secular groups such as unions, fraternities, bowling leagues, or clubs. Additionally, in a pluralistic religious environment, there are dozens of less costly religious groups that offer similar goods without higher-priced commitment. So, why do some people donate large portions of their income and time to a church or even sacrifice their lives just to obtain social and material goods that others are obtaining at a much lower cost? There must be something more to be gained by it that those less willing to contribute do not expect to receive.

Stark and Finke argue that this apparent discrepancy between received goods and the costliness of group obligations can be resolved by considering the "otherworldly rewards" religious groups provide (2000). In essence, religious groups have an advantage because they can offer rewards that extend well beyond any that can be offered by secular groups in a temporal world. Unfortunately, Stark and Finke's concept is limited in that it only accounts for rewards. Consequently, I have opted to present a new concept I will call "supernatural resources". *Supernatural*

resources include any powers, privileges, rewards, incentives, or sanctions that can only be obtained from or utilized through objects or entities outside the known empirical realm. I have opted to use this new term in order to emphasize the ability of religion to go beyond simply offering rewards. My concept includes rewards *and* punishments along with any otherworldly thing a religion utilizes on behalf of the group or its members. I believe this concept is more comprehensive and can be more useful in the study of religion[1].

Religious groups that most effectively draw on supernatural resources will be most likely to have members willing to make costly sacrifices. Nevertheless, many religious groups offer access to or utilize almost identical supernatural resources and still vary greatly in terms of the solidarity they experience. Why do hundreds of millions of individuals in the United States and across the world continue to make costly sacrifices to their religions despite cheaper and well-known alternatives that offer comparable religious and secular incentives for participation?

UNDERSTANDING BELIEVER DEPENDENCE

The key to understanding the origin of believer dependence on religion is to acknowledge that supernatural resources and religious explanations about them can have no impact on individual choice unless people believe in them. For a religious group to *claim* it has access to supernatural resources is not enough to compel its members or potential members to accept any costly obligations. As mentioned

[1] This rationale can also be applied to why I do not use Stark and Bainbridge's (1987) term "compensator". In addition to focusing narrowly on rewards, "compensator" seems to imply that the rewards offered are not real and merely compensate for benefits human beings cannot really obtain. This is unnecessary.

previously, to be offered salvation is not the same as believing you will actually obtain it. Thus, an individual's dependence on a religious group is not simply determined by what the group says it has to offer; rather, it is a function of the *strength of member belief*, or their level of confidence, in the religious explanations provided (Stark and Finke 2000). Therefore, the discrepancy between commitment levels of religious groups that seem to offer similar otherworldly incentives should be accounted for by examining differences in member confidence levels. In essence, *the more confidence members have in the possibility of utilizing supernatural resources, the more valuable those resources become to them, and the more likely they will be to sacrifice for them*. But why?

To answer this question, we must consider what has been well discussed as a problem for religion in literature related to risk and uncertainty (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1995; Montgomery 1992). If we assume, for example, that the probability of God's existence is unknown, then any given decision related to this possibility is made under conditions of uncertainty. It stands to reason that if uncertainty is reduced (confidence increases), there is a greater likelihood of a person acting consistently with the belief. However, if the probability *is* known, then adherents can begin to consider the risk of their religious decisions. Under conditions of risk, individuals can calculate exactly what the odds are that a particular outcome will come to pass (Montgomery 1992; Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

Applying risk assessment to religion has been considered problematic because the probabilities related to the existence of supernatural resources are

thought to be unknowable. While this may be true from an empirical perspective, from the perspective of a believer, knowledge *is* a possibility. Consequently, if people have "no doubts" about what they believe, acting on them, from their perspective, is no longer a question of uncertainty, but rather a question of risk. In the believers' minds, there would be no risk. If this is true, there may be substantial differences between those who are "very sure" their religious beliefs are true and those who "know" their religious beliefs are true. Either way, *those who are more confident (low uncertainty) should be more likely to act on their beliefs, while those who know (no risk) should be most likely.*

If my reasoning holds, the limitation of rational choice theories of religion outlined by researchers of risk and uncertainty become methodological rather than theoretical—how do we adequately measure whether or not people actually know supernatural resources exist? Of course, this is the limitation of studying the impact of any kind of knowledge, whether it is religious or secular. For example, though there is much scientific evidence that human evolution occurred and many scientists claim to "know" it is true, ultimately they know because they believe in the common interpretation of the evidence. At the same time, many others claim to "know" it is not true. They often know because of their interpretation of the Bible. One could argue that those with empirical evidence must know better, but that is simply not the case. They just have reasons for knowing that they can more easily show to other people. It is likely that issues of uncertainty and risk can be more effectively dealt with as better measures of what people know become available. Neuroscience

research to be examined in more depth later in this chapter might provide some insights (Newberg et al. 2001), but much remains to be done to resolve these concerns. In the present study, I will largely focus on issues of uncertainty rather than risk.

Ultimately, if people truly believe in the existence of salvation, enlightenment, eternal life, or other special privileges or powers offered through religion, they have much to gain from it. Accordingly, I submit the following proposition:

> *Proposition 1: The more confidence members have in the existence of supernatural resources, the more dependent they are on their religious group.*

In addition to instilling confidence that supernatural resources are real, to maximize dependence, groups must nurture member confidence that their group has exclusive access to those resources. Polytheisms, for example, are inherently non-exclusive in that they offer a variety of gods that can perform an assortment of specific services. Because their powers are only partial and specific, polytheistic gods cannot inspire individuals to form exclusive relationships with them. Nor can they offer resources as compelling as those that can be offered by an all-powerful God. As a result, individual members of polytheistic religions have little incentive to continue to patronize a group that imposes any high costs on them, much less kill or die for it (Stark 2001). Indeed, the very fact of multiple gods with limited powers

should encourage actors to shift from cult to cult for purely opportunistic purposes and to exit them once they begin to impose any substantial costs.

Unlike polytheistic cults, monotheistic cults are not pay-as-you-go organizations that charge fees for discrete services. To believe in the One True God is to exclude relationships with all other gods. This is made explicit in the first commandment, the Apostle's and Nicean Creeds, and in the first passage of the Koran. In this way, monotheistic religions are exclusive bargaining units between individuals and one God. According to Stark (2000), in order to justify the exclusion of all other gods, the One True God must be seen as having unlimited abilities and desire to provide followers with the maximum benefit possible. Only then can he demand greater, and completely exclusive, commitment from followers. Consequently, "belief in One True God maximizes the capacity to mobilize human actions on behalf of religion" (Stark 2001). With this example, Stark suggests that because they are exclusive and can offer access to greater supernatural resources, groups with monotheistic doctrines will tend to cultivate higher levels of dependence than polytheistic groups (2001).

However, there are many denominations that confess to have monotheistic foundations without requiring members to make exclusive commitments to that particular denomination. Just think about religious leaders who express to their members that where they find God is irrelevant, as long as they find him. Given such doctrines, it does not matter much whether you are a Presbyterian or a Methodist as long as you accept Christ. In this situation, the exclusivity principle will be less

salient. An exclusive commitment to Christianity might be expected, but not to Presbyterianism. Consequently, the potential for solidarity will be greatest not in groups that profess to have access to the One True God, but rather in groups that claim to be the *only true church* with a proper connection to God and have members who believe it.

> *Proposition 2: The more confident members are that they belong to the only religious group that has access to desired supernatural resources, the more dependent they are on the group.*

For members who believe they belong to the only true church, the cost of exiting the group is potentially infinite, as there are no other religions with access to the supernatural resources they are seeking. From this perspective, exclusive religious groups have an automatic advantage over nonexclusive ones when it comes to sanctioning rule-breakers. They can more effectively punish deviants through excommunication. Being excluded from a polytheist cult or a non-exclusive monotheistic denomination seems trivial by comparison because there are a variety of other gods or denominations that can provide assistance and offer identical otherworldly benefits. On the other hand, losing access to the only group believed to have a proper connection to God is a terrible situation for the believer.

Member compliance with beliefs and practices that distinguish them from the rest of society can also impact their dependence on the group. Iannaccone has argued that imposing bizarre rules or restrictions on members stigmatize them and thus penalize them for participating in outside groups (1992). Likewise, Stark believes

that distinctive religious culture, practice, and commitment are necessary for religious group survival because they socially encapsulate group members (Stark 2001). *Social encapsulation* occurs to the extent that group members "are impeded from having normal associations with outsiders." (Stark 2001:184-185). It goes without saying that some religious beliefs and behaviors are more encapsulating than others. As a result, religious groups can increase the level of social encapsulation their members experience by introducing religious explanations that include rules or require the adoption of visible cultural markers that separate their members from outsiders. Jews who maintain a kosher diet, for example, cannot just go anywhere to eat with friends and cannot easily dine at a non-orthodox friend's or relative's home. Religions that require members to adopt segregating beliefs and practices effectively reduce member opportunity to access resources outside the group.

> *Proposition 3: To the extent that members of a group adhere to religious beliefs and practices that socially encapsulate them, they will be dependent on the group.*

Another important factor that can enhance member dependence on religious groups relates to religious capital (Iannaccone 1990). Religious capital refers to "the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture" (Stark and Finke 2000:120). The cultures of many religious groups overlap considerably, and thus many kinds of religious capital are quite easy to conserve even if one decides to switch religious groups. However, the transferability of religious capital can vary greatly. For example, someone who has invested in learning a common form of

Christian prayer or is a firm believer that Christ is the Savior of the world can quite easily find hundreds of Christian groups that perform prayer in a similar fashion and have similar convictions. Indeed, one can easily switch groups and still conserve this capital.

In contrast, a religious group that holds to idiosyncratic beliefs and practices, such as a focus on a unique text or a very distinctive form of meditation, should have members that would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to conserve that capital if they switched to another group. Therefore, to the extent that religious capital is *inimitable,* meaning it is absent from or would be rejected by other groups, investment in it increases member dependence on the group by increasing the cost of defection (Finke 2004). Consequently, a Lutheran's mastery of the Protestant Bible should have little impact on her dependence on the group because all other Protestant Christian religions utilize the text. In contrast, a deep faith in the Book of Mormon greatly increases dependence on the Mormon religion because the book is unique to that tradition and is rejected by all others.

Religious groups that require members do a more in-depth study of unique and sacred writings or rituals, or that provide consistent training in the distinctive religious traditions and history of the group, will be more likely to have members who view leaving the group as a very costly venture. In the end, any inimitable religious capital acquired within the group will inevitably become a sunk cost if members choose to leave (Bourdieu 1984), while most social capital and common religious capital will not necessarily be lost.

Proposition 4: To the extent that members of a group acquire inimitable religious capital, they will be dependent on the group.

The Doctrine of Control

Hechter (1987) rightly points out that their dependence on the group cannot alone account for member willingness to significantly donate and serve to secure group ends. Individuals will naturally strive to obtain all the benefits being offered by a religious group without paying the costs. Thus it is essential for groups to find ways to persuade members to comply with group obligations and contribute to the group. Hechter argues that the only way to curtail free-riding is to have some formal controls in place that will compel members to observe group requirements. He defines formal controls as "rules and enforcement procedures that are the outcome of conscious planning" (p. 59). He emphasizes that the ability of a group to assure compliance depends on how capable it is of determining whether individuals are fulfilling or avoiding group obligations (monitoring capacity) and whether or not it has sufficient resources to effectively reward and punish the monitored (sanctioning capacity).

For all groups, both monitoring and sanctioning can be extremely costly. Hechter relates several specific methods groups use to minimize the cost of control. For example, control costs can be reduced by increasing the visibility of members, having members share the monitoring burden, and by publicly sanctioning rule breakers (1987). However, religious groups can also utilize supernatural resources to keep control costs to a minimum. Indeed, they have a clear advantage over secular

groups in that many of the goods they offer cannot be obtained in the empirical realm. In fact, the *only way* to obtain them is by believing in and complying with the explanations offered by religion. As a result, what people are required to do to gain access to supernatural resources is entirely doctrinally determined by each religious group.

Religious groups that make compliance optional by doctrine are less likely to have members who fulfill their obligations and contribute to group ends. If, however, a group effectively convinces its members that they can gain access to supernatural resources *only* by obeying the rules and contributing to the group, logically followers must comply whether or not the group can or will formally punish them for disobedience. In essence, despite the social nature of religion, its otherworldly benefits and sanctions are offered to individuals and as such are *selective incentives* (Olson 1965). Doctrines that dictate that only individual compliance can obtain them can potentially decrease and even eliminate the need for and cost of formal controls. Group members who believe such doctrines will donate to and serve the group simply because they believe doing so is the only way to access desired supernatural resources.

> *Proposition 5: To the extent that members of a religious group are confident that compliance and contribution are required to access supernatural resources, the cost of control decreases.*

Additionally, members of religious groups will be more likely to comply with group rules when they are sure that rebellion will *always* be detected and punished.

In every case concerning secular groups, free riding is an option, or at least can be attempted successfully. However, when group members have strong faith in religious doctrines that teach of eternal sanctions and an omniscient God who watches them, they know they cannot get away with anything even if they manage to deceive other members of the group. Thus, they will be more likely to use self-control, and the need for formal controls is significantly reduced. If God is always involved and watching, no amount of intellect or cunning can construct a successful routine of free riding that will not be detected.

Proposition 6: To the extent that members of a religious group have confidence in a God who is monitoring them, the cost of control decreases.

Requiring conformity to specific outward practices can also influence the cost of control. Religions with doctrines that prohibit smoking or that require members to dress a certain way can more efficiently monitor their members. Where smoking and certain types of dress are prohibited, the smell of cigarette smoke and the sight of improper attire make rule-breakers obvious to other members and organizational leaders. Religions can also make group members more visible by giving each of them a specific responsibility to fulfill. If a certain member is in charge of setting up chairs for a meeting and when people arrive the chairs have not been set up, then it is clear who is shirking responsibilities. This will alert group leaders to check up on that person to find out if there are problems about which they should be aware. Consequently, groups with specific traditions and doctrines that promote or prohibit certain outward behaviors and customs ultimately have an

advantage over those that are willing to accommodate any custom or practice members feel a desire to live by.

Proposition 7: To the extent that religious group members are required to adopt or reject particular outward practices, the cost of control decreases.

Obviously, individuals will not accept costly obligations from religious groups for no reason. Religious believers are swayed by the basic human tendency to want more for less, just like everybody else. Groups that effectively promote the specific types of doctrines and practices outlined above can more efficiently maximize the dependence of their members and minimize the cost of monitoring and sanctioning, thus increasing the probability that individuals will contribute significantly to group ends.

By convincing members of the reality of an omniscient and omnipotent God, the group's exclusive access to supernatural resources and the need to comply with group obligations in order to access them, religious groups create a cultural context wherein individuals are more likely to voluntarily contribute substantial personal resources to group ends. Religions that abound in doctrinally established rules and norms that socially encapsulate their members and cannot be broken without being easily detected, present an environment where social interactions are focused inside the group and rebellious individuals can effortlessly be discovered and sanctions quickly enforced.

Ultimately, doctrinal content and the religious practices associated with it, when believed to be true and necessary, can influence the priorities and motivations

of individuals and whole groups. Because of their confidence in unseen resources revealed to them through their religious groups, believers are compelled to put certain culturally shaped secondary desires over their primary ones. In this way, their self-interests become intricately connected to the interests of the group. In a sense, what they believe they need to do to achieve their aspirations as individuals can only be achieved by promoting and sustaining the success of the religious group. When this is achieved, solidarity can be maximized.

Of course, most of what I have argued is contingent upon the existence of faithful and confident group members. In the absence of individuals who believe in and follow it, religious doctrine is inconsequential—or at least should not have a measurable social impact. Furthermore, without compelling religious doctrines to make them consequential, religious customs and practices are less meaningful. In the end, religious groups may make all sorts of claims about truth, the nature of the empirically unobservable, and the importance of religious practice, but those claims are only relevant to the extent that their members have confidence in them. Thus, it is to the issue of confidence that I now turn.

Nurturing Confidence

An effective theory of religious group solidarity must establish the conditions under which an individual's confidence in religious explanations will increase and when it might fade. Religion consists largely of explanations about how the world works and the place of humans in it. The feature that sets religion apart from the secular realm is that *religious explanations rely on supernatural assumptions*. By

nature, these assumptions cannot be verified using current scientific tools and thus must be accepted by religious adherents on faith. If it is true that faith in religious doctrines can influence individual action and religious group solidarity, then it is crucial to understand how it works. Indeed, if confidence is the universal problem of religion, as Stark suggests (2001), then the universal problem for those seeking to understand religion is explaining where confidence comes from and how it impacts individual and group behavior.

I must point out that the present theory is not trying to explain the origins of the content of religious culture. Rather I am attempting to provide a compelling explanation of how individuals come to develop confidence in the cultural content provided to them by existing groups. Furthermore, I am seeking to identify which elements of religious culture work to promote confidence and solidarity. One of the key assertions of the present theory is the rejection of the idea that confidence in religious beliefs is static. In fact, what people believe and how strongly they believe it can change significantly over time. In this section, I will discuss the conditions under which confidence in religious doctrines should vary.

Stark and Finke offer an invaluable insight into the social mechanisms that produce variable confidence in religious explanations. They argue that an "individual's confidence in religious explanations will increase to the extent that other people express confidence in them" (2000:107). To *express confidence* is to verbally or behaviorally act in a way that is consistent with a belief in or commitment to a particular idea or explanation. Keep in mind that by this definition

an individual may express confidence in an idea through her actions without ever intending to. The suggestion that expressions of confidence can impact beliefs and behaviors of others is not new. Coleman (1990) explained that when individuals have no basis for determining the validity of their perceptions, they will transfer control to another person. He cites Sherif's famous experiment in which subjects were placed in a dark room and asked to determine whether or not a point of light was moving and which direction it was going. When they were unable to determine the motion of the light, subjects tended to agree with the assertions of the confederates.

In his discussion on the character of faith, Niebuhr (1989) claims that it is often the case that people come to have convictions about truth based on the trust they place in others. He argues that our reliance on science is a prime example of this. Although "science represents to most men a great body of beliefs about objects of which they have no direct knowledge . . . they hold these beliefs with great assurance because they trust the scientists" (p. 41). Most of us know almost nothing about how carbon dating works or how DNA analysis can identify whose hair is whose, but we accept the conclusions we are told out of simple faith in the expressions of those who supposedly do know.

While researchers acknowledge that human beings believe because of the assurances of others, there is only limited research examining when and why expressions of confidence will produce confidence in others. Accordingly, Niebuhr (1989) suggests that "this much neglected social character of knowing and believing requires further explorations" (p. 34). Likewise, Coleman calls for "further research

into contagious beliefs" and argues that this is "necessary before an explanation of such behavior systems can be integrated in a general theory of action" (1990:219-220). So, how is confidence in religious explanations expressed, and when will those expressions have an impact?

There are a variety of ways in which individuals can express confidence in religious explanations. Perhaps the most straightforward and familiar expressions are verbal—people tell others what they believe in the form of testimonials. Public prayer might also be considered a verbal expression of confidence in that by praying, individuals are acting in a way that is consistent with the belief that there is someone or something to pray to. Ultimately, the forms that religious expressions of confidence can take range from simple declarations of belief in God to the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life to a cause.

Obviously, not all religious expressions of confidence are equally important in shaping the perceptions of others. In fact, it can be very difficult to know whether or not an individual acting in a way consistent with a particular religious belief is truly confident or is just going through the motions or submitting to social expectations. Consequently, it is essential to specify when expressions of confidence should be most likely to produce confidence in others. I submit the following proposition:

> *Proposition 8: To the extent that individuals observe religious expressions of confidence that are reliable and trustworthy, their confidence in religious explanations will increase.*

But what makes an expression of confidence more reliable and trustworthy? I propose that they can typically be considered more reliable and trustworthy to the extent that they have the following characteristics:

- They are *costly.*
- They are *unattended by coercive or social pressure.*
- They *come from dependable sources.*
- They *come from individuals held in high regard.*
- They are *consistent, enduring and repeated frequently.*

In the absence of any opportunistic reasons to fake confidence, we should have little reason to doubt such expressions are sincere. Still, each of the above conditions gives us some insight into which types of religious teachings and practices should be more likely to produce confidence. Indeed, in this case, actions speak louder than words. Dying for the faith costs more than saying "I believe!" and one can be certain that the martyr has nothing to personally gain by death that would be of any social or worldly value.

While public expressions of confidence may be subject to large amounts of social pressure, private ones are less so. As a result, private religious devotion can be considered a more trustworthy expression of confidence than public devotion. Accordingly, the confidence of an individual who spends hours in private religious meditation is less questionable than the confidence of an individual who only practices such meditation in public. Similarly, an adult praying to God in his home

can be considered a more convincing expression of confidence than if he were praying to Him during a religious service.

In a different vein, no one denies that human beings listen to and trust some people more than others. Those who provide information to us that consistently checks out will be trusted, while the fallibility of those who have consistently lied to us or whose information rarely seems to be accurate will also be apparent. Additionally, we will be prone to trust those with whom we have formed close emotional ties or who we hold in high regard. While most of us would easily dismiss a total stranger's claim to have seen an angel, we might think twice before totally rejecting the same claim by a dependable family member, long-time friend, or well-respected member of the community (Iannaccone 1995).

Finally, there is a big difference between an individual who prays only in times of crisis and one who prays several times a day, every day of the year, when life is going well. Almost everyone will agree that consistent, enduring faith is more believable than faith that only emerges intermittently or in a crisis. In essence, one of the primary ways for religious adherents to make religious choices under conditions of uncertainty is to look for social cues that indicate the commitments made by others are credible (North 1989; Root 1989). Of course, the factors I have presented are not enough to make someone sure that religious explanations are true. It is quite possible that the people they are observing are lying or insincere, and ultimately they have no way of knowing the truth about the motivations of others. However, each of

the five factors I have mentioned should send a signal of credibility and thus work to promote confidence in the observer.

If seeing others express confidence produces confidence, then it follows that one of the most effective ways for religious groups to build faith is by encouraging their members to *publicly express confidence*. By fostering such public interactions among adherents, religious groups provide opportunities for members to observe each other's expressions of confidence. Religious groups that effectively promote public expressions of confidence that are more reliable and trustworthy will be most likely to maximize confidence.

In addition to the effect of observing compelling expressions of confidence by others, confidence in religious explanations can also be enhanced through *emotion*. Each day individuals experience an assortment of emotions. These emotions might occur while participating in a wide variety of different behaviors such as praying, listening to music, meditating, talking to a friend, or reading a book. While some individuals do not believe their emotions have anything to do with the divine, others view some feelings as being related to or caused by otherworldly forces. If individuals view their emotions in supernatural terms, these experiences should enhance their confidence in the reality of an otherworldly realm and the validity of religious explanations.

> *Proposition 9: To the extent that individuals have emotional experiences they consider to be related to the supernatural, their confidence in religious explanations will increase.*

Ultimately, the only aspect of emotion that is necessarily related to the social world is how we come to interpret them. In fact, where emotions lead us largely depends on social factors. Religious groups can help to shape the results of emotional experiences by providing explanations about what the experiences mean and how they should impact behavior. Religious groups that do not provide a religious framework within which to interpret emotional experiences will be less likely to have members who identify these experiences as being connected to the divine or approach them in a way that is consistent with group ideas. In contrast, religious groups with doctrines that provide interpretations of emotional experience that connect them to religious explanations and the existence of supernatural resources will have members who are more confident.

In essence, Durkheim ([1912] 2001) was right to suggest that the meanings attached to emotions rely on social context. However, he failed to specify exactly when the content of those meanings would shape behavior and ultimately impact solidarity. I am arguing that emotion only plays a role in shaping solidarity to the extent that it increases confidence in solidarity-producing doctrines (see Propositions 1-6). In other words, certain cultural content infused with emotion shouldn't have any effect on solidarity and might even have the opposite effect. Imagine a group that has a collective emotional response to the idea that their individual desires should trump all else. It would be hard to predict this should lead to social outcomes beneficial to the whole group. By examining how emotionally infused ideas about

the supernatural can serve to produce solidarity, I hope to have answered some of the criticisms aimed at theories that ignore this issue (Collins 1997).

Most religious cultures attach positive and negative consequences to certain actions. To the extent that religious adherents experience these consequences to be true, they should have more faith in religious explanations. When devotees perceive that their prayers have been answered or that meditation has brought them closer to enlightenment, or that paying tithes has brought great financial blessings, or that dancing for rain has brought rain, their faith has been verified. In essence, they see the cause and effect relationship between their religiosity and agreeable consequences—they see the fruit of their religious actions. The positive results derived from living according to religious dictates will be taken as proof of the worth and truthfulness of religious teachings. Likewise, the negative outcomes religious adherents associate with not living according to the faith will produce the same result.

In a sense, belonging to a particular group and choosing to live by its doctrines is akin to conducting an experiment. Adherents shape their lives in ways consistent with the teachings of the group and then consider the impact of their choices. If living the faith produces the desired results, the individual has personal evidence that the religion works. If members of a religion fail to perceive its effectiveness, their confidence in its explanations about the world should wane. These personal experiences of proof are perhaps the most likely to result in total

uncertainty reduction, or what the faithful might consider to be absolute knowledge that the doctrines are true.

Proposition 10: To the extent that individuals personally experience the efficacy of religious explanations, their confidence in them will increase.

Group members encouraged to express confidence will often relate how living according to religious principles has helped them. They will convey their witness of personal miracles and the influence of the divine in their daily lives. Consequently, another potential benefit of encouraging group members to express confidence to one another is that they will raise awareness about the different ways in which living the religion has real consequences. As members realize the possibility of various manifestations of the efficacy of religious explanations, they will be more likely to see such manifestations in their own lives. This will come to be considered as evidence of the existence of supernatural resources and the ability of a religious group to utilize them.

Reframing Ritual

With the theoretical foundations above in place, it seems important to turn to a discussion of ritual and its role in producing religious group solidarity. It has been widely accepted in the sociological and anthropological literature that participation in rituals breeds confidence in religious explanations (Collins 2004; Stark and Finke 2000; Collins 1997; Geertz 1973; Homans 1941; Davis 1949; Durkheim [1912] 2001). Kingsley Davis observed that "ritual helps to remind the individual of the holy realm, to revivify and strengthen his faith in this realm" (1949:534). Likewise,

Stark and Finke have noted that ritual can "reassure humans that religious phenomena are real" (2000, 109). While similar statements affirming the connection between ritual and confidence are many, arguments explaining exactly why this connection exists and specifically how it relates to variations in levels of social cohesion are few. Consequently, Collins has argued that the traditional characterizations of ritual have not "clearly formulated causal mechanisms of situational ingredients producing variations in solidarity, emotion and belief" (2000, 8). In this section I will explore how the theoretical framework outlined above can help to resolve the shortcomings in prior discussions of ritual and its connection to emotion, religious culture, and ultimately to religious group solidarity.

One of the most confusing elements surrounding debates about ritual is that no one can agree on what it is. To some, a daily tea party is just as much a ritual as an Aztec human sacrifice or a Catholic sacrament. I was once in a graduate-level class in which the instructor suggested that the class itself was a ritual. Indeed, the term "ritual" has been used to describe both religious and secular activities, including both routine and infrequent events (Goffman 1967).

For my purposes, it is imperative to distinguish behaviors shaped by or focused on religious explanations from those related to non-religious ideas and objects. Therefore, rather than contend with the whole host of definitions of ritual as they pertain to religion and otherwise, I have opted to focus on a new construct that clearly specifies the religious nature of certain social activities. Thus, behavior conducted in a religious context that might often be considered ritualistic will simply

be viewed as a form of religious interaction. *Religious interactions* are any collective activities that are guided by religious explanations or during which a common belief in the supernatural is implied or stated. Religious interactions might include everything from rhythmic group chants to the God of Rain to an intimate conversation between two individuals during which they express their religious convictions. Although they might still be considered rituals by some (Collins 2004; Goffman 1967; Durkheim [1912] 2001), day-to-day interactions devoid of any religious content, whether they be emotionally infused or not, would not fall under the umbrella of religious interaction.

I submit that "rituals", in the broadest sense of the term, are not likely to strengthen *religious* faith and promote social cohesion unless they are religious interactions that have certain confidence-producing characteristics. For instance, rituals that provide a forum within which faith in particular religious doctrines is *clearly* expressed should be more likely to enhance confidence in religious explanations. Jewish Passover rituals, for example, commemorate the time when God freed the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Indeed, the holiday is called Passover to remind participants that the Angel of Death "passed over" the first-born sons in the homes of the Jews who had put lamb's blood on their doors. Likewise, the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist is meant to connect those who participate to the blood and body of Christ and communicates to them the reality of his divine presence.

As people participate in rituals, they observe others who, by participating, are expressing confidence in the explanations associated with them. Rituals devoid of specific religious content or full of content that cannot be understood or accessed by participants will be less effective. In essence, rituals will be most successful at sustaining confidence in doctrines and ideas that are related to and apparent during the ritual itself. If the content is obscure or inaccessible, the collective expression of confidence manifested to participants is less likely to be connected to specific religious explanations and therefore is not as likely to produce confidence in a group's religious doctrines.

Given that they have comprehensible content, rituals will be more likely to promote faith to the extent that they are reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence. Consequently, difficult and time consuming rituals performed frequently among friends in the absence of coercive pressures (Passover rituals) will more effectively build confidence than effortless rituals rarely performed among strangers (Communist celebrations). Ultimately, all things being equal, rituals that are time consuming, repetitive, and that clearly reflect particular religious explanations will sustain religious confidence much better than those without these attributes.

Another factor that makes ritual important is that it can play an intricate role in connecting specific religious doctrines to emotional experiences. Some researchers have suggested that emotion is the very thing that links ritual to confidence. For Durkheim ([1912] 2001), emotion is an essential product of ritual. He referred to this emotion as "collective effervescence" and believed it to be the

natural result of repeated collective interactions. He argued that the effervescence produced by communal activities would naturally become connected to norms and beliefs. However, in his mind, it did not matter what those norms and beliefs consisted of. The mere fact that members of the community came to agree that certain objects and ideals were sacred would be enough to ensure solidarity. Eventually, these ideals would be internalized by members of the community and would function to preserve and strengthen the group as a whole.

Likewise, Collins (2004) asserts that ritual interaction produces emotional energy. From his perspective, individuals make strategic choices in pursuit of interactions that yield the best emotional payoff. Interactions that pay emotionally will be repeated, while those that do not will stop. Throughout this process, beliefs will be continually shaped and adjusted, and they can also fade depending on the emotional outcomes of interactions. Thus Collins reiterates the idea inherent in Durkheim's thought that norms and beliefs are "sustained by ritual practices," but if the practices stop, "the beliefs lose their emotional import, becoming mere memories, forms without substance, eventually dead and meaningless" (p. 39).

While both Collins and Durkheim suggest that it is emotion that links ritual to strong belief, they, like many others, fail to provide anything more than sparse observational evidence of the connection. Fortunately, advances in areas outside of social science can give us insights into the impact of intensely focused religious activity that go beyond simplistic social observation.

In 2001, Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause published a study that addresses the impact of religious activity from a neurobiological perspective. They argue that the religious impulse is rooted in the biology of the brain. To study this, they used a single photon emission computed topography camera (SPECT) to scan brains to detect the location of radioactive tracers that indicate the blood flow pattern to the brain while individuals were at the moment of meditative or spiritual climax. They found that religious behavior focused intensely on a particular object of attention such as a God "inclines the brain to adjust its cognitive and emotional perceptions of the self in a way that religiously minded persons interpret as a closing of the distance between the self and God" (p. 81).

Newberg and his associates argue that the effect relates to the degree to which the orientation area of the brain (which gives us our sense of self) is blocked from neural flow (2001). Their scans indicate that intensive religious activities such as prayer and meditation can produce this blockage, which results in "mild unitary sensations, such as feelings of unity and common inspiration shared by worshipers in a moving religious service" (p. 116). As a result, they understand mystical experiences not as "emotional mistakes or simple wishful thinking," but rather as "a series of observable neurological events, which, while unusual, are not outside the range of normal brain function" (p. 7). In fact, "both spiritual experiences and experiences of a more ordinary material nature are made real to the mind in the very same way—through the processing powers of the brain and the cognitive functions of the mind" (p. 37).

Of course there are no scientific measures that can conclusively determine whether what is experienced during focused religious activities comes from a divine source or is purely an interesting biological process or both. For sociological purposes, it does not really matter. The key point here is that actions such as prayer and meditation that strongly focus the mind on particular objects thought to have a sacred nature produce *genuine and measurable* emotional sensations for the actor that can be effectively accounted for in neurological terms. In short, an empirical link between confidence, emotion, and religious activity that aims to focus the mind appears to have been successfully demonstrated.

Durkheim was right, at least about one thing: emotional mechanisms can play an important role in producing confidence. It seems safe to say that emotionless religion is less compelling. The brain activity resulting from religious behaviors intensely focused on sacred objects causes an emotional experience that reveals to the participants the reality of what they believe, thus increasing their confidence. However, Durkheim was wrong if he thought that these faith-building emotions could only be experienced during collective rituals. Newberg, *et al.* show clearly that individuals can have intense spiritual experiences that reaffirm their faith even when they are not in the presence of other members of the community.

Ultimately, the only aspect of religious emotion that is necessarily shaped by social surroundings is how we come to interpret them. Consequently, as indicated previously, it is important analytically to separate the emotions experienced during religious activities (and, for that matter, during any other types of activity) from the

interpretation of those emotions. The sense of oneness a Christian feels when worshipping Christ, the feelings of wonder experienced by a Muslim praising Allah, and the awe encountered by a tribe member during a rain dance, in all probability reflect similar if not identical neurobiological processes. However, while the Muslim associates these feelings with the reality of Allah and the truthfulness of the Qur'an, the Christian is likely to interpret the feelings as evidence of the existence of Christ and the legitimacy of the Bible. From the perspective of the tribe member, the actuality of the God of Rain is apparent.

There can be no doubt that the objects of focus during religious interactions are always supplied to participants socially, usually by their religious groups—at least they originate from some preexisting religious culture. Thus, another reason religious rituals are important is that they provide a context within which emotion can be experienced and then interpreted in a way that is specified and endorsed by the group. Rituals that are intensely focused on particular religious doctrines encourage a fusion of emotion and content that can increase the participants' faith in the specific doctrines of the group. In the end, ritual devoid of ideas will be less emotionally compelling. As noted by Newberg and his colleagues, "[i]n order for human ritual to be effective in engaging all parts of the brain and body, it must merge behaviors with ideas; it's this synthesis of rhythm and meaning that makes a ritual powerful." Essentially, ritual has the capacity to turn an idea or doctrine into an emotional, or more appropriately, a spiritual experience, which can ultimately give

religious individuals "satisfying proof that the scriptural assurances are real" (pp. 90-91).

Ultimately, robust confidence is not automatically produced simply because individuals participate in rituals and exist in a common religious culture. The differences in the mechanics, doctrinal content, and substance of rituals can create significant variation in what group members have confidence in and how much confidence they have in it.

I have argued that ritual participation will increase member confidence in religious explanations in primarily three ways. First, ritual can serve as an expression of confidence. As religious communities participate in collective rituals, individuals demonstrate to each other that the doctrines and principles attached to those rituals are valid, thus strengthening collective confidence. Second, ritual can increase confidence by fostering emotions that provide participants with real and immediate experience that can help them feel connected to the divine. Finally, rituals that are performed in connection with specific religious beliefs can help to tie the emotions experienced by participants to religious doctrines. In this way, ritual can provide adherents with interpretations of emotional experiences that are consistent with and supportive of their group's explanations.

Of course, these confidence-building effects are not necessarily limited to ceremonial, ritual religious interactions. Presumably, many forms of private religious devotion and religious interaction that have yet to be systematically examined have the potential to instill confidence and promote solidarity in a way similar to ritual.

Simple public prayers, for example, can be emotionally charged and are said in conjunction with the explanation that God hears and answers them. Arousing hymns are sung in praise of deities, thus acknowledging that they are there. Even two individuals having a private and moving discussion about their beliefs may experience the effects so often attributed to ritualistic activities. Future research should seek to measure emotional responses to and the interpretations of these and other types of religious activity. Generally, we still have much to learn about the link between emotion, confidence, and behavior.

THE EFFICACY OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE

While it is certainly the case that religions offer a number of compelling social incentives to adherents, what makes religion interesting and unique as an institution is that it forthrightly utilizes resources that are beyond empirical detection. Religious culture has an advantage in the production of collective goods because it tends to be focused on and effective at instilling and utilizing confidence in the existence of these resources.

However, the fact that people have confidence in the teachings of their religion does not necessarily mean they will contribute to the group. Unfortunately, Durkheim never really discussed the possibility that confidence in only certain types of values and beliefs would result in member willingness to sacrifice individual resources to secure group ends. He seemed to think almost any common beliefs charged with emotion, regardless of what they were, could have the effect of increasing group solidarity. While perhaps a minimal level of group cohesion always

manifests itself in some way when common convictions are present, variations in the willingness of group members to stay with, contribute to, and serve their group cannot be fully explained within his framework. Individuals can be confident and still not want to contribute. What they are confident in is crucial.

I have argued that the most powerful religious cultures should be those that claim to have exclusive rights to utilize supernatural resources and *require* members to adhere to extensive obligations and unique practices. In short, solidarity will be enhanced by strong confidence in religious explanations that are capable of maximizing dependence and minimizing the cost of control. We might refer to this as *solidarity-producing content.*

If the extensiveness of member dependence and the effectiveness of group control are connected to solidarity-producing religious explanations and practices, then religious groups, at least partially, determine their own destiny as they select religious doctrines and practices to promote. This implies that even a religious monopoly facing little competition or a religion with theological foundations that contradict seemingly overwhelming scientific evidence can maintain a highly confident and committed membership that is willing to contribute time and material wealth to the church. As critics have attacked the pluralism hypothesis offered by the religious economies model, explanations of religious commitment that do not rely on this axiom have become increasingly important. Ultimately, some religious cultures, by virtue of the doctrines and behaviors they promote and require, will have a stronger influence over their adherents than others. In a way, by increasing

dependence on the group, religions solidify demand for the brand of culture they have to offer.

All of this suggests that variations in the level of confidence experienced by members of religious groups and the impact confidence can have on how committed members are to sacrificing personal resources to group ends are extensively determined by the content of the group's religious culture. It is *only* by instilling sufficient confidence that groups can utilize important supernatural resources to motivate their members to donate to collective ends. Thus, the most effective religions find ways to inculcate their members with a *surety* that the group actually has the ability and the authority to help them access supernatural resources that do in fact exist.

This perspective retains the prediction of cultural continuity in cases where traditional forces are stronger, or in other words, when expressions of confidence in solidarity-producing content are more reliable and trustworthy, but also predicts that individuals will be more likely to opt out of religious groups with fragile cultures that fail to express confidence in a compelling way or express confidence in non-solidarity producing content.

While I have not ignored the importance of sanctions, the primary claim of this study is that effective religion works not just because there is a community to sanction the deviant, but rather because there is a community that instills in each of its members the rightness of adhering to group teachings. People contribute to group ends because they are confident it is right and necessary to contribute. They stay with

their group because they are sure they must. Using this simple premise, most collective action problems can be solved.

CONCLUSION

The impact of culture as a shaping force, whether religious or otherwise, is variable, and the variation must be explained. Effective theories must be able to predict when certain cultural elements will have more or less influence. By incorporating confidence more fully into rational choice theories, we can begin to effectively examine and explain how culture *acts* on group members rather than simply using it as an ad hoc variable that enters the equation when it suits us. I have argued that religious culture does not have the capacity to significantly impact people's behaviors simply because it's there. Rather a culture's efficacy is rooted in individual choices to accept it, and the confidence its members have in its effectiveness and validity. Ultimately, the staying power of religion and its transferability to future generations is intricately connected to the nature of its content.

Throughout this work, I have two main conceptual dependent variables. The first is *religious group solidarity,* which is measured along the dimensions of retention, donation, and service. The second is *religious confidence*, which I argue is very important in the production of solidarity. It is necessary to separate the two in order to keep the analysis clear. In the forthcoming chapters, I will empirically examine these two dependent variables by testing hypotheses based on the

propositions related above. I hope that by so doing, I can shed more light on the role of confidence and belief in solving the problem of religious sacrifice.

I have attempted to address culture and socialization in light of rationality, or at least in terms of purposive action. My theory goes beyond cultural explanations that assert the power of religious traditions without specifying the mechanisms driving the emergence of this power and its force in society. I have tried to provide rational choice proponents with a framework for understanding seemingly high levels of solidarity even when there is an absence of apparent formal controls, material benefits, and structural constraints, which I believe can shed new light on the free-rider problem (Olson 1965). By so doing, I hope I have provided some insights into why some individuals choose to depart from how they were raised while others do not.

I have proposed that religious group solidarity is particularly influenced by member confidence in the plausibility of the existence of supernatural resources and their confidence in the validity of the group's exclusive right to utilize them. Member dependence can further be enhanced if the group requires the acquisition of inimitable religious capital and instills confidence in beliefs and behaviors that socially encapsulate their members.

In a sense, as groups promote solidarity-producing religious explanations and members come to believe in them, their individual welfare comes to be equated with group ends (and interestingly, in most cases, the stated group end is to promote the welfare of members). Essentially, the most compelling religious groups excel at

fashioning individuals who are sure that their self-interests are intricately intertwined if not equal to the interests of the whole group.

Often, religious choices are thought of in terms of preferences. However, it might be better to think of religion as a set of convictions that cause people to ignore, overcome, or reject their personal preferences (or wants and desires) in a way that is consistent with the doctrines and actions that they believe to be true or from a higher power (Smith 2003). Thus, a person may not actually prefer it at all, but rather believe it must be done *despite* his preferences. Still, it is unclear how preferences and beliefs are related. If a preference or belief changes, is there some sort of immediate effect that restores consistency between them? I suspect that beliefs and preferences are sometimes in conflict and remain that way for substantial periods of time. Notwithstanding, cognitive dissonance theory might be effectively used to better understand this relationship (Cooper 2007; Montgomery 1996; Montgomery 1992; Festinger 1957). Perhaps higher confidence in certain beliefs produces a greater magnitude of dissonance (Cooper 2007). This could help us know when to predict behavioral change rather than attitudinal change.

It may be what religion accomplishes is more of a reordering of preferences. Individuals make choices to align their wills with God's will or with the natural order of the cosmos because they believe they must. As their conviction grows, so too does their desire to live the way they believe is right—they come to prefer what they believe. If those convictions are properly nurtured and serve to attach members more strongly to their group, solidarity is enhanced. If the faithful are left to

themselves and confidence wanes, or if they come to have confidence in individualistic principles, solidarity is diminished.

Although I believe the present theory has more potential for accurately predicting how strongly people will believe and what they will do about it, cognitive dissonance theory might have something to tell us about the psychological mechanisms at work in this process. Unfortunately, doing any empirical tests directly comparing the two perspectives is beyond the scope of the current project. Future research should use cognitive dissonance theory to empirically explore the relationship between religious belief, religious confidence, and religious preferences.

While it seems reasonable to assert that someone who barely believes is less likely to act than someone who is absolutely sure, this possibility has been scarcely measured and rarely tested. This theory suggests that we must move away from conceptualizing and measuring belief in "yes" and "no" terms and create more accurate measures that consider the variations in the strength of the belief experienced by individuals (Bishop 1999).

Neglecting the importance of confidence and doctrine as causes driving human action is a serious mistake that has been continually made. Ultimately, whether considering belief in religion and otherworldly phenomena or belief in the validity of science and empirical observation, each of us is driven to some degree by our convictions. Here I will focus largely on the impact of religious confidence. However, the implications of my theory are broad. If we can understand the origins and impact of confidence in various cultural contexts, we can better comprehend and

account for the actions of not only religious believers, but also of any who are motivated by belief, for surely we all believe in something.

Chapter 3: Building Faith within Families

Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Skepticism is the life-blood of science. Science progresses only as long as individuals *seek* the truth about the unknown and question the truths that have already been discovered. The instant we have no doubts about our understanding of the nature of society, the world, and the cosmos, there will be nothing further to comprehend or discover, and scientific institutions will be no longer necessary. Of course, it seems almost impossible to imagine this ever becoming a reality. In contrast to science, I have argued that religion is fueled by confidence. It is the fact that the faithful are confident they have *found* truth that drives religious progress and motivates spiritual devotion. The instant all religious believers become seriously skeptical of their spiritual worldviews, religious institutions as we know them will collapse.

Interestingly, the second scenario mentioned has been deemed not only possible, but also probable and even inevitable by some social scientists. Indeed, secularization theorists have long been the most outspoken respondents to questions about where religious confidence comes from and what will become of it. By *religious confidence* I mean the degree of certainty with which individuals believe in religious doctrines and principles, especially those related to the supernatural realm. Unfortunately, instead of formulating theories that help us understand the causes of variation in the confidence levels of religious individuals and groups, secularization

theorists seem to have almost perfect faith in the conclusion that confidence in the existence of a supernatural realm will gradually decline and possibly even disappear entirely as a relevant motivator in the lives of most people (Bruce 2002; Berger 1967).

Even some of the earliest sociologists predicted the decline or demise of religious confidence. Marx and Engels (1964), for example, argued that a revolution to overthrow all institutions, including religious ones, along with steady doses of scientific-atheist propaganda, would effectively eliminate the human invention of religion and the confidence people have in it. To them, religion was nothing more than "the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces" (p. 147). Confidence in religious ideology only continues to persist because of the social oppression of the masses and their helplessness in the struggle against their exploiters. Destroy that and religious confidence dies with it.

Durkheim believed that as religious institutions were uprooted by industrial and social change, they would eventually be replaced by civil religion rooted in moral individualism. The worship of gods and belief in the supernatural would no longer be necessary in modernity, and thus confidence in their existence would fade ([1912] 2001). More recently, Berger asserted boldly that religion was doomed to expire as increasing pluralism and modernization made it clear to most that an absolute and otherworldly truth was simply implausible. He argued that in the face of an increasing number of reality definitions, no particular one of them would have a

chance of retaining the confidence of any mass of believers (1967). Consequently, only those who are "rather careful to huddle together closely and continuously with one's fellow believers" will stay believing (164).

While Berger has since renounced many of his original ideas (1999), other researchers have continued this tendency to downplay and even dismiss the prospect that faith in something unearthly can be a real and lasting motivation for modern human behavior (Sherkat 1997; Wallis 1991; Buchanan 1979). Bruce is currently one of the most avid proponents of secularization theory. In a more recent explanation of what secularization theory entails, he reiterated its claim that increasing diversity in modern times "calls into question the certainty that believers can accord their religion" (2002:17). Ideas that are not universally shared are much harder to believe in, and thus Bruce concludes that we should expect religious believers to become continually less believing in the face of pluralism.

Secularization theory dominated the social science view of religion for over a century. However, in the 1980's, when it became obvious that traditional secularization theory could not account for the unusually high levels of religious participation and belief, critiques began to mount (Froese 2008; Froese and Pfaff 2005; Stark 2000; Stark 1999; Stark 1996; Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Finke and Stark 1992; Stark and Bainbridge [1987] 1996). As a result, a new paradigm emerged that directly contradicted many of the core assertions of secularization theory (Stark and Finke 2000; Warner 1993).

The religious economies model argues that religious competition is not unlike competition in the economic sphere in that religious goods are "produced, chosen and consumed" (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). They claimed that it is the fact that the United States has the most deregulated and pluralistic market that has led to its high levels of religiosity and belief. Unfortunately, while proponents of the religious economies model have noted that religious confidence still abounds and is really important (Stark and Finke 2000), not much has been done to address exactly where it comes from or why it impacts religious behavior. Several researchers have noted that the major weaknesses of the new paradigm are its handling of issues related to belief and uncertainty reduction (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1995; Montgomery 1992).

As proponents of the religious economies model brutally attacked long-held beliefs about the inevitability of religious decline and showed that religion and supernatural belief are here to stay (Hout and Fischer 2003; Swatos and Olson 2000; Berger 1999; Stark and Iannaccone 1994), there was an equally forceful response attempting to reanalyze and reformulate secularization theory (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Marwell and Demerath 2003; Bruce 2002; Gorski 2000; Swatos and Olson 2000).

One of the most recent attempts to revise secularization theory has come from Norris and Inglehart (2004). They argue for a theory that "emphasizes the extent to which people have a sense of existential security—that is a feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted." They contend that it is, in

fact, feelings of vulnerability and risk driving religiosity in the world. Children raised in less secure societies will view religious values as being more important in adulthood. Their study found that in the most prosperous and equal societies "a systematic erosion of religious practices, values and beliefs" has occurred (2004: 4).

While their primary assertion that "when life is bad, people are more likely to turn to God" is nothing new, the cross-national evidence Norris and Inglehart provide is new and it is compelling (2004). Additionally, unlike previous versions of secularization theory, their theoretical underpinnings seem to allow for a situation of religious explosion in a time of increasing insecurity. When reading the book, I kept waiting for the chapter citing a few such examples, but other than a few mentions of heightened church-going in the wake of 9/11, it was nowhere to be found. Still, I believe some progress has been made.

Regrettably, Norris and Inglehart (2004), as do almost all secularization theorists, focus exclusively on societal-level processes and say little about the mechanisms that cause individual or group-level religious confidence to decline. Why exactly should insecurity impact how strongly people believe in something? There is certainly an answer, but they do not seem to have it. In all this literature much has been said about religious confidence, but little has been done to properly explain and account for it. Secularization theorists seem stuck on predicting the decline of religious confidence and consequently the decline of religious demand. Amid the discussions and research about the decline of religious institutions, practices and beliefs, there seem to be no thorough attempts to establish the

conditions under which an *increase* in religious confidence might occur. This actually makes sense because the trends they typically believe result in the decline, such as the rise of individualism and rational thought, increasing diversity and insecurity, and greater social and structural differentiation, seem very unlikely to change or be reversed in any long-term way (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Bruce 2002). If these are indeed the causes of religious doubt, there may be no turning back.

Religious economies buffs, on the other hand, with a few exceptions (Froese 2008; Froese and Pfaff 2005), seem committed to holding religious demand constant and trying to explain almost everything in terms of religious supply. This too is problematic and ignores the simple fact that some people who believed in and wanted religion yesterday often do not seem to believe in or want it today. Those in the paradigm that explicitly address variation in effective religious socialization typically do so without much reference to religious confidence and have not dealt effectively with issues of belief and uncertainty reduction (Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1990). Thus, rather than settling on any of the above conclusions, it behooves us to keep science alive by remaining skeptical and exploring and testing alternative explanations.

A simple glance at the religious landscape in the United States reveals considerable variation between religious groups when it comes to having confidence in some of the specific religious doctrines I have argued will impact religious group solidarity (Table 3.1). While this is only a cross-sectional view, it gives us some idea

that different religious groups achieve different confidence levels. It is remotely possible that those who happen to have the most religious confidence only join particular religious groups and not others. It is more likely, however, that factors endogenous to the cultures of the religious groups themselves account for the strengthening or weakening of member confidence. If this is true, then it follows that groups may have the ability to generate and maintain religious confidence among their members *despite* the broader confidence-killing forces so touted by secularization theorists. If a growing number of groups effectively do this, then contrary to the predictions of secularization theory, we might even expect a global increase in religious confidence.

Whether or not it is the fate of supernatural belief to give up the ghost, it seems important to examine the forces that enhance and diminish an individual's religious confidence within a local setting rather than just in the societal-level setting typically studied by secularization theorists (Norris and Inglehart 2004). If we can identify and explain the origins of individual religious faith, we might be able to specify the patterns of culture within particular religious groups that effectively produce collective confidence. Groups that promote activities that produce individual confidence will be more likely to have a group full of confident individuals. Ultimately, these same principles could be applied to help us better comprehend the factors that produce or resist secularizing effects in whole societies.

In the previous chapter, I suggested a few key mechanisms that should have the effect of nurturing religious confidence. These include observing the reliable and

trustworthy expressions of confidence of others (often through religious interactions), having emotional experiences considered to be related to the supernatural, and personally experiencing the efficacy of religious explanations. In this chapter I empirically examine the impact each of these mechanisms has on producing varying degrees of religious faith.

CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE HOME

When it comes to explaining what causes individuals to have confidence in religious teachings, it seems only natural to focus on family upbringing. Indeed, some of the theoretical discussion in the previous chapter can help us to understand the conditions under which parents will be more likely to pass religious convictions to their children. If it is true that costly, uncoerced, consistent, enduring and oft-repeated expressions of confidence from dependable and highly regarded sources are crucial to religious confidence building, then we might expect some of the most lasting expressions of religious confidence to be those from parents to their children.

In the home setting, parents have little or no outside pressure motivating them to express confidence in their religious beliefs. Most outsiders will never really know what occurs within the walls of others' homes. As a result, parents' willingness to pay the costs of observing religious teachings in the home and to instill those teachings in their children might be considered the most trustworthy of all expressions of confidence. In addition to this, the affective bonds between parents and children often lead children to trust their parents' guidance. In essence, it may be that the most effective religious socialization will occur as parents demonstrate the

importance and validity of religious doctrines and teachings by the way they conduct themselves within their homes and how they interact with their children.

Accordingly, children's conviction of religious explanations should increase as their parents engage in religious interactions with them. They do this by living according to the dictates of their religion and by reading scriptures, praying, and attending church with their children. If the above theory is accurate, parents who place a low priority on expressing confidence in religious explanations will have children who are less confident. Religious groups that most effectively instill within parents a desire to express confidence to their children in the home will be most likely to retain a confident next generation.

In addition to this, parents can have a tremendous impact on shaping their children's perception of emotional experiences. As previously suggested, children who learn to attach their emotional experiences to the supernatural should be more likely to have confidence in their religious beliefs. Likewise, children who are taught to realize the efficacy of their religion will have greater faith. I consider each of these variables in the analysis that follows.

While most religious theories take religious socialization as a given, I empirically examine specific hypotheses that predict how certain elements of religious socialization impact a child's religious confidence. In a sense, this could be viewed as a way of seeing the degree to which a child has internalized specific religious teachings. I believe that this can supplement and enhance the research surrounding the religious capital approach by enhancing understanding of additional

mechanisms that might be underlying the relationship between household piety and religious commitment.

DATA AND METHODS

My analysis of the origins of religious confidence will utilize data from the *National Study of Youth and Religion*[1] (NSYR) that was collected between July 2002 and April 2003. The NSYR consists of a nationally representative telephone survey of 3,370 English- and Spanish-speaking American teenagers (ages 13-18) and parents. Random-digit-dialing procedures were used to obtain participants for the study. Households consisting of at least one teenager who lived in the home for at least six months of the year were eligible to participate. When multiple teenagers were present, the one with the most recent birthday was interviewed in order to maintain the representativeness of the sample.

Surveys were conducted by trained interviewers in a private setting, and each parent and teen was given $20 to complete the survey, for a total of up to $40 per household. The investigators reported an overall response rate of 57%, and while a higher rate would be preferred, comparisons with the 2002 U.S. Census data, the 1999 Survey of Adults and Youth data, the 1999 National Household Education Survey, the 1996 Monitoring the Future survey data, and the 1994 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health indicate that the NSYR provides an

[1] The National Study of Youth and Religion, www.youthandreligion.org, whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, and Lisa Pearce, of the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

unbiased nationally representative sample of U.S. teenagers ages 13-18 (for further details see Smith and Denton 2003).

I have opted to examine the religious confidence of *teenagers* for specific reasons. I believe it is safe to say that the majority of teenagers probably did not "choose," in one sense of the word, to be in their religious culture. Thus, anything that builds confidence in the doctrines being promoted by parents and the religious group itself should be a real effect, not the byproduct of confidence previously existent that compelled the individual to be religious in the first place. I believe this allows me to better establish the causal order of my variables. Many of these teenagers were essentially in the process of being raised in specific religious traditions at the time they were studied. Any faith they developed in religious explanations can be more confidently traced to the process of their religious upbringing, the religious interactions in which they have engaged, and the religious events they have experienced.

Teenagers are at a point in their lives that occurs before substantial dropping out of religious groups or denominational switching. Examining them as teenagers avoids many of the problems that frustrate efforts to tease out effects of religious socialization among adults. Another advantage of the NSYR is that it provides us with access to parents' responses about how they have interacted with their teenage children. In other words, we can find out what parents say they do and measure the impact their actions and interactions have on their children.

As always, the limitations of the scientific method are clear, and it is within these constraints that a sociological theory of religious confidence must be tested. Consequently, my theory focuses on faith building mechanisms that can either be measured directly or that can be reported by those who have experienced them. Fortunately, self-reports of belief, religious interactions, contact with the divine, and experiences proving the value of religion to believers can be quantified and variations can be found. Of course, we have to take individuals at their word and thus, there must always be a level of skepticism when we examine empirical results based on survey data.

Dependent Variables

The theory outlined in the previous chapter suggests that confidence in religious explanations can help to maximize religious group solidarity. The NSYR asks a number of questions that can be used to measure religious confidence. Unfortunately, researchers accounted for only a few possible responses. The more ideal measures of religious confidence that I have found are in datasets that exclude the other variables that I need to test my theory and that deny me the benefits of conducting this analysis on a population of youth. Considering these factors, I believe the NSYR is the best available data to test the theory.

Due to the low range of variation of each of these measures, it is impossible to treat them as interval-ratio. Indeed, they are barely ordinal measures. Consequently, I have opted to convert the confidence measures found therein into binary measures that indicate the presence of the strongest measured level of

religious confidence or the absence of it. While not perfect, this form of measurement is suitable to test my theory because it allows me to examine the impact of being highly confident compared to more doubtful. Of course, I hope future measures of religious confidence will be more effective. Using binary dependent variables will also permit me to test the ability of my theory to predict who has the most confidence in certain, specified religious doctrines using binomial logistic regression analysis. Furthermore, it will allow me to compare the impact of each independent variable on nurturing faith in each separate belief examined.

I focus on three beliefs as measures of religious confidence. The first I examine is belief in God. Each teenager was asked, "Do you believe in God, or not, or are you unsure?" Respondents that answered "yes" are considered as having the highest level of confidence and were coded as "1" in the dummy variable. Those who answered "no" or "unsure/don't know" were coded as "0". Responses to the questions "Do you believe that there is life after death, definitely, maybe, or not at all?" and "Do you believe in the existence of angels, definitely, maybe, or not at all?" are used as the second and third measures of religious confidence. Respondents who answered that they "definitely" believe were coded as "1", while those who responded "maybe," "not at all," or "don't know" were coded as "0".

Belief in God, an afterlife, and angels I submit are important reflections of confidence in the existence of supernatural resources that are very common in the dominant religions found in the United States. Fortunately, only 25 respondents (about .7%) reported being in a religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Native American,

Pagan/Wiccan) that may not incorporate one or two of these basic Biblical beliefs. While I would eventually like to thoroughly examine the origins of confidence in other specific religious doctrines unique to particular religious cultures such as these, due to the constraints of available data, I focus the current analysis on these three more general and commonplace Judeo-Christian doctrines about the supernatural.

Explanatory Variables

The theory in the previous chapter directs us to three specific factors that should impact religious confidence. The first is observing the reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence of others; the second is having emotional experiences considered to be related to the divine; and the third is personally experiencing the efficacy of religious explanations. There are several NSYR variables that indicate whether or not teens are observing expressions of confidence. Teenagers who pray with their families regularly are consistently exposed to the expressions of confidence of their family members. Consequently, I examine whether or not teenagers pray with their families at mealtimes ("Does your family regularly pray to give thanks before ore after mealtimes, or not?") and whether or not they pray with their parents outside of church and mealtimes ("In the last year, have you prayed out loud or silently together with one or both of your parents, other than at mealtimes or at religious services?"). Both of these variables are binary, where a value of "1" indicates they pray and "0" indicates they do not.

Parents who promote participation in religious activities are also expressing confidence in religion. The more often they encourage, the more trustworthy and

reliable are their expressions of confidence. Parents were asked, "How much, if at all, have you encouraged [your teen] to participate in a religious youth group?" Answer options included "a lot", "some", "a little", and "none". With such limited variation, I did not feel it appropriate to treat this variable as interval-ratio and thus, I have included a dummy variable where "1" indicates the presence of parents claiming they encourage their teens to participate in a religious youth group "a lot", the reference group being less frequent encouragement or none at all (coded as "0").

Families can also express confidence in a reliable way as they talk about religion at home. The NSYR asked teens, "How often, if ever, does your family talk about God, the scriptures, prayer, or other religious or spiritual things?" Respondents could answer "every day" (coded as "6"), "a few times a week", about once a week", "a few times a month", a few times a year", and "never" (coded as "1"). I have opted to treat this variable as an interval-ratio variable for purposes of this analysis in order to maximize the amount of variation accounted for. That said, it will not be open for any direct interpretation, though we will be able to see if discussing religious things more often as a family increases the odds of belief.

The final expression of confidence measure I will examine is church attendance. Attending church regularly exposes individuals to reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence as they are taught by their pastors and as they interact with fellow parishioners. While this is an expression that comes from outside the home, it also reflects what is happening in the home in that parents typically have much to do with whether or not their children actually attend. Teens were asked

"about how often" they attended church. They could answer "never" (coded as "0"), "few times a year", "many times a year", "once a month", "2-3 times a month", "once a week", or "more than once a week" (coded as "6"). Again, in order to utilize all the information we have, I treat this variable as interval-ratio in the analysis, though it will not be clearly interpretable[2].

Many individuals claim to have personally experienced proof that their religious inclinations are beneficial. To measure if teenagers have experienced the efficacy of religious explanations, I examine whether or not they reported having experienced a "definite answer to prayer" and whether they have witnessed "a miracle from God". In both these cases, "yes" is coded as "1" and "no" as "0". Though emotions are hard to measure, we do have self-reports of emotional experiences. Having emotional experiences that are interpreted as being related to the supernatural is the final causal factor proposed to impact religious confidence. The best indicator of this found in the NSYR was the question, "Have you ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful or not?" Those who answered "yes" are considered as having had a spiritual experience and those answering "no" as not having had one. Table 3.2 provides descriptions of the variables in the model.

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[2] It may be that other expressions of confidence from outside the home are more or less effective at instilling confidence in religious explanations. Religious education is often one that is considered. To examine this possibility I considered the variable "In the last year, how often, if at all, have you attended religious Sunday school?" When I ran the model to include this variable, the results did not change. The new variable was found to be statistically insignificant. Due to issues of collinearity, I decided not include this variable in the same model with church attendance (Pearson's R=.568). However, I also ran the same analysis substituting Sunday school attendance for church attendance, and again the results were nearly identical. Statistically, the Sunday school attendance was indistinguishable from the church attendance variable.

Control Variables

In order to better assess the independent effects of my explanatory variables on my dependent variables, I control for age, gender and being unaffiliated with religion. While the ages of respondents sampled only range from 13-18, it is possible that the religiosity of older teenagers might be influenced quite differently from younger teenagers. Consequently, I have included it as a control variable. Also, I have included a gender dummy variable because it is commonly known that there are gender differences when it comes to religious belief and participation. Finally, I have included a dummy variable indicating teens that are not religious. Obviously, we would expect those who are affiliated with a religious group to believe more strongly in supernatural resources than those who are not. By including a dummy variable for those with no religion, we can uncover the effects of observing expressions of confidence, experiencing religious efficacy and emotion while holding whether or not they are religious constant. In other words, we can find out if the explanatory variables included impact religious confidence independent of whether or not a teenager is religious in general.

Hypotheses

Considering the measures outlined above, I test the following hypotheses:

> Hypothesis 1: Teenagers who pray with their families at mealtime and with parents outside of meals and religious services will be significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife than those who do not.

Hypothesis 2: Teenagers who receive "a lot" of encouragement from their parents to do activities with their religious youth group are significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife than those who do not.

Hypothesis 3: Teenagers who speak more often about religious things with their families will be significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife than those who do not.

Hypothesis 4: Teenagers who attend church more often will be significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife than those who do not.

Hypothesis 5: Teenagers who have seen miracles and had prayers answered will be significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife than those who have not.

Hypothesis 6: Teenagers who have had a powerful experience of spiritual worship will be significantly more likely to have high confidence in the existence of God, angels, and an afterlife.

RESULTS

Table 3.3 reports the results of binomial logistic regression analyses in which the strongest (or less than strongest) level of belief in God, angels, and an afterlife are the dependent variables. The odds ratios of the confidence outcomes for each explanatory measure and the controls are noted along with the Nagelkerke R^2 statistic as a rough estimate of the total explained variation (Nagelkerke 1991).

Overall, it is important to observe that collectively the variables included explain a significant amount of the variation of teen belief in all three of the confidence measures. This indicates the soundness of the model as a whole. Indeed, while no direct interpretation can be made, the Nagelkerke R^2 estimates the model might account for almost 40% of the variation in who is sure God exists. Looking at each measure separately, it is apparent that all of the explanatory variables with the exception of saying prayers with parents outside of church and mealtimes are significant predictors of definite belief in God at the .05 level. Regular participation in mealtime prayers significantly increases the relative odds that a teen will have strong faith in the existence of God, and talking with family about religion more often significantly increases the odds that teens will be sure God is there. Parental encouragement to attend religious youth groups is also a positive predictor of confidence in the existence of God.

Interestingly, the three most influential determinants of belief in God are related to more personal experiences with the divine. When controlling for all other variables, teens who have received a definite answer to prayer are about 2.7 times more likely to believe than those who have not, while youth who have witnessed a miracle are 2.4 times more likely to have solid faith in God's existence compared to teens who have never witnessed one. Finally, teenagers who have had a powerful spiritual experience are almost two times more likely to believe in God than teenagers who feel they have never had such an experience.

A similar outcome is found as we examine predictors of high confidence in the existence of angels. Having a spiritual experience and both measures of religious efficacy are significant, positive predictors of confidence at the .001 level. Participating in family prayer at mealtimes and discussing religion more often in the home are also shown to have confidence-building effects. Again, however, prayer with parents outside of meals was found to be an insignificant factor, while encouragement to attend youth group was also found to be insignificant. Here again, emotion plays a key factor, as those who have experienced a moving spiritual feeling are 1.8 times more likely to believe in the definite existence of angels than those who have never realized such a feeling.

Of the three dependent variable measures, it seems the model is least effective at predicting strong belief in the existence of life after death (Nagelkerke R^2=.202). Even so, five of the eight explanatory variables were still found to have a significant effect on confidence in the afterlife doctrine. Interestingly, neither prayer measure had a measurable impact on whether or not strong faith in the afterlife was present. Similarly, parents' encouragement of their teens to participate in religious youth groups failed to have an impact on building confidence in this particular doctrine. On the other hand, the more often youth are exposed to family religious discussions and attend church, the more likely they are to definitely believe in an afterlife. Once again, in this case, the strongest determinants of confidence are the measures of personal contact with the divine. Having a spiritual experience increases the relative odds of definitely believing in the afterlife by over 200%, while teens

who have received an answer to prayer or witnessed a miracle are about 1.6 times more likely than those who did not to have strong confidence that there is an afterlife.

Examining the control variables, age failed to have a significant impact on any of the three dependent variable measures tested, while, as expected, having no religious affiliation adversely influenced confidence in the existence of God, those without religion being half as likely to believe. Surprisingly, being non-religious did not, in any significant way, diminish (or improve) the likelihood that a teen would have confidence in the afterlife or angels. Consistent with prior research suggesting females tend to demonstrate higher levels of religiosity than males (Miller and Stark 2002; Ferraro and Kelly-Moore 2000; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997; Stark 1996), being a teenage girl did increase the relative odds that an individual is a believer in God and angels. However, gender had no effect on teenager confidence in the existence of life after death.

There is clear evidence found to support all six of my hypotheses. However, hypotheses 1 and 2 are only partially supported by the data. While mealtime prayer was a significant predictor of belief in God and angels, it did not significantly impact confidence in an afterlife. Prayer with parents outside of church and mealtime did not seem to enhance the power of the model to predict belief in any of the examined dependent variable measures. This may be due to the fact that the question asked about whether or not such a prayer occurred in "the last year". Unfortunately, given this wording, there is no way to distinguish regular or frequent prayer from almost

non-existent prayer. I suspect a measure that discerned variation better would have yielded significant results. Parental encouragement to attend youth groups only had an impact when it came to belief in God. It did not seem to foster stronger belief in an afterlife or angels, thus providing only minimal support for hypothesis 2.

The support for hypothesis 3 in considerable—teens who have families that regularly talk about religion are significantly more likely to have high levels of confidence in all three of the doctrines under consideration (all with a probability of <.001). More frequent church attendance also increased the odds that teens have strong faith in all three beliefs; thus hypothesis 4 is supported. Perhaps the most persuasive evidence is found for hypotheses 5 and 6. Having prayers answered, witnessing miracles, and having powerful or moving spiritual experiences seem to be three most influential of all the determinants of religious confidence.

MAKING CONFIDENCE POSSIBLE

The evidence presented suggests that if families can effectively promote reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence in the home, they will be positively impacting the confidence of their children. Family prayers, religious discussions, church attendance, and parental encouragement of religious participation are all religious interactions that if engaged in regularly can significantly impact the religious confidence of youth in at least some doctrines. My analysis also reveals that it is the more private experiences that teenagers have had that influence their faith the most. Receiving answers to prayers, personally witnessing a miracle, and having profound spiritual experiences imbue the believer

with ever greater confidence that religious explanations are true. All of this suggests that factors endogenous to families have some power to determine which youth will believe and which will doubt.

The first step to achieving high levels of religious confidence is for parents and others to provide children with a cultural framework within which the existence of supernatural resources is possible. At first glance, teens experiencing the efficacy of their religion and having their own moving spiritual experiences may seem to have little to do with the family they are in or the religious community they come from. But if we look deeper, the social nature of even these most personal experiences becomes clear. A child who is never taught to pray cannot receive an answer and a child who is never told that certain emotions are a sign of God's presence will be much less likely to interpret a positive feeling as a spiritual experience. The very fact that a significant proportion of surveyed teenagers are sure they have had their prayers answered, or had a powerful spiritual experience, is a testament to the cultural environment that taught them to view the world in a way that makes such contact with the supernatural a reality.

Even witnessing miracles requires a mind that can consider the possibility that some events cannot be explained without deference to the supernatural. To an atheist, a miracle is simply an event that can be explained given a bit more information. The atheist mind is closed to the possibility of a supernatural cause. To a believer, a miracle is a reflection of the power of the supernatural that cannot necessarily ever be scientifically explained. The believing mind has been opened to

suppose all things are possible whether they can be explained rationally or not. The possibilities each person becomes conditioned to consider are largely socially and culturally determined.

Of course, entertaining the possibility that religious ideas might be valid is only part of what is necessary to nurture religious confidence. Children must also see that the existence of supernatural resources is a motive of behavior. This is effectively accomplished as they are surrounded by reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence. Children who see faith in action will be more likely to believe in such things themselves. A self-proclaimed religious parent who does not talk about religion might be perceived as thinking it is not worth discussing. Parents who take time to pray with their children are showing them that God is real enough to talk to. Teenagers who attend church see potentially thousands of other people who think a religious service is important enough to attend. Assuming people are choosing to participate voluntarily, all of these behaviors, whether sincerely motivated or not, are outward indications of confidence that the ideas and doctrines supporting them are true.

As parents teach their children about religion, spirituality, and God, and as they show them by example how to behave as believers, they in essence are playing an important role in shaping how their children come to perceive the world. Religious groups that emphasize theologically the household as the locus of spirituality and communion with God will be better at instilling confidence than those that are highly individualistic.

Of course, it is true that other contradictory (even secularizing) influences can emerge and might have the potential to change any person's mind about what he believes. Consequently, how effective parents and religious institutions are at instilling confidence and how consistent and enduring their expressions of confidence are become crucial to determining the staying power of the confidence they nurture in their children. While I suspect that the most confident youth will have a tendency to become the most confident adults, the truth about the persistence of religious confidence into adulthood is something that needs to be examined in the future using quality longitudinal data.

Ultimately, it should not be thought that these principles apply only to the young. Religious interactions people have throughout adulthood are part of a continual process of religious socialization that essentially never ends. Consequently, as adults change their environments or make new friends, the type and content of religious interactions they engage in and the expressions of confidence they witness can change, thus affecting their perception of truth and reality. Confidence building is a lifelong process.

What Secularization Theory Got Right

Considering these results more broadly, I submit that the idea that religious confidence will become largely diminished once the proposed macro forces of secularization emerge within a civilization is the major flaw of secularization theory. Indeed, it seems that a significant portion of the variation in religious confidence of youth can be explained without resorting to any discussion of modernity and its

effects. This suggests that despite the secularizing forces in the world around them, families and religious groups can bolster confidence in religious explanations by promoting and sustaining faith-nurturing behaviors and experiences within their communities. It may be that if enough people do this, the majority of any population can conceivably remain strong believers indefinitely.

Ultimately, my analysis suggests that Berger was at least partially right when he argued that "if one is to believe what neo-orthodoxy wants one to believe, in the contemporary situation, then one must be rather careful to huddle together closely and continuously with one's fellow believers" (1967:164). Truly strong confidence is best created and sustained in closely huddled communities and families that share, promote, and act on common beliefs. This was Durkheim's most important finding in his study of Totemism ([1912] 2001). Families of believers, religious groups, and cultural communities in general, who through their actions and expressions of confidence pass faith to the young and old alike can, in effect, maintain high levels of confidence for generations in spite of modern, secularizing influences.

However, while the data suggest that something akin to huddling together closely certainly can help to sustain religious faith, the reality of this necessity is not nearly as pathetic as it seemingly purported to be. To remain believers, people need not necessarily cut themselves off from the rest of the world or remain ignorant of other points of view; rather, they need only to continue to take the time to frequently engage in religious interactions with fellow believers. In essence, faith can be

maintained by individuals and groups even if they venture out into that world and interact with it.

Furthermore, it may be that the "contemporary situation" so important to the predictions of secularization theory has only indirect relevance. While some of the exogenous variables noted by secularization theorists might certainly be related to societal-level changes in religious confidence, my research suggests that what the families and groups themselves do also is important in determining the ultimate outcomes. What I am suggesting is that it is not just religious diversity; the rise of rationality, science and individualism; the increasing social and structural differentiation of society; or the level of existential security experienced that causes secularization (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Bruce 2002). Rather, the possibility for the emergence of widespread secularization is, at least partially, determined by how individuals, families and religious leaders choose to interpret and respond to those forces. If they respond by upholding faith-building traditions in the face of new and modern influences, then confidence can stay strong. If, on the other hand, the majority of people choose to give up the interactions, rituals, and experiences that instill confidence and motivate them to be religious, then secularization might occur (Abel 2005). Each individual, each family, and each religious leader must choose which direction to go.

I believe that producing the sort of outcome predicted by many secularization theorists would require most individuals, families, and religious groups to choose to move away from the aspects of their culture that instill religious confidence. While

there are many examples in all societies of families and religions that have done so, there are just as many examples of people at the local level moving in the other direction. The causal factors thought to be propelling secularization theory seem to have little to tell us about the origins of pockets of intensifying religious confidence. Likewise, they are hard pressed to accurately predict why certain people in technologically and scientifically advanced societies lose faith at the same time that others are gaining it.

Ultimately, secularization theory can do nothing to help us understand why 96% of Baptists have no doubts that God exists while only 74% of Catholics are that sure (Table 3.1). Both groups officially claim he does. Are American Catholics somehow more influenced by secularizing forces than Baptists? Perhaps, but I suspect it is more likely that Baptists are more engaged in expressing religious confidence at home, better at convincing people to come to church, more likely to point out and promote miracles that people can witness in their day-to-day lives, and more effective at helping adherents interpret their emotional experiences as being related to God. The day that Baptist ministers choose to move away from the traditions that promote faith, they too will see their members lose confidence.

By promoting a confidence-producing culture, religious leaders can foster more intense demand for what they have to offer. I submit that religious leaders, by the policies they adopt, might have more of an impact on the religious confidence of believers than any factor offered by secularization theory. Certainly, secularizing forces might have an affect on the choices any pastor makes, just as any family

might choose to leave a church for similar reasons. However, I believe the collective will remain strong as long as they perpetuate a culture that breeds strength and solidarity. My study provides evidence that at least three elements of such a culture include effectively promoting reliable and trustworthy expressions of confidence, successfully raising awareness about how the efficacy of religious teachings are manifest, and providing religious interpretations for emotional experiences and an environment in which such experiences are promoted and can occur.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here has several implications. First, one of the most important roots of piety is the household. Second, consistent and enduring expressions of confidence within the household will be more effective at instilling lasting piety than half-hearted, irregular religiosity. Third, religious groups that emphasize the household as the center of spirituality will be more effective at building a confident membership base than those that are individualistic, despite any broader secularizing forces in society.

If secularization is happening, it is happening *because of*, not despite, the choices of parents, religious leaders, and religious groups. Rather than asserting a general move toward secularization, my theory predicts that certain groups with certain characteristics will experience reduced confidence, while others could experience increasing confidence in supernatural phenomena. Of course, there is still much left to be explained when it comes to the origins of religious confidence and

secularization, but I think this provides a start to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of belief and uncertainty reduction in research on religion.

Future studies should be designed to pit the predictive power of secularization theory more directly against that of my theory. Secularization theorists should seek to test their assertions at the religious group, family, and individual level to see if the same mechanisms that have been found to explain macro-level secularization can also predict more localized secularization *as well as* increasing piety when it is found. In other words, let's see some secularization studies that address localized situations of increasing religious commitment. Perhaps both perspectives, when combined, can help us understand these processes more fully.

I have most strongly posited that families, by virtue of how they organize their religious lives within the home, can defy secularizing forces and promote confidence. The data in this chapter seem to suggest that variation in religious confidence levels of American teenagers can be partially accounted for by examining the experiences they have in their homes and their personal contact with the divine. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the findings noted above relates to the fact that some of the expressions of confidence examined seem to differentially impact the various measures of religious confidence. This seems to be an indication that different types of religious interactions can influence confidence in specific doctrines in diverse ways.

Praying, for example, is an explicit expression of confidence that there is someone to pray to. Consequently, it is intuitive to conclude that, if nothing else, it

should foster confidence in the existence of some sort of god. Likewise, many religious traditions pray to saints or other spirits, and thus it comes as little surprise that it might foster belief in otherworldly beings besides God. While prayer, at least in Western tradition, seems to rely directly on the existence of supernatural beings, there is nothing directly implicit in the act of prayer that would suggest to the praying individual that her death will not be the end of her life. Consequently, the fact that prayer was not a significant predictor of strong belief in life after death might make some sense. There is a strong likelihood that the form prayer takes and who or what is actually prayed to by different groups will determine to a great extent whether or not participation in prayer results in increased confidence in God, the devil, karma, angels, reincarnation, or some other religious explanation.

This discrepancy provides us with a sense of what is perhaps the major weakness of the current study—I have only considered common religious doctrines. Though all three doctrines examined are widely accepted in the United States and understanding the origins of confidence in them is certainly important, I hope in future studies to be able to examine how each individual religious culture can shape the confidence of religious adherents in specific ways.

Table 3.1 gives us a glimpse into some of these possibilities. Why do 100% of Bible Church members believe that there is definitely life after death while only 16% of Unitarians believe it? Also, while it is well known that both Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Catholics emphasize doctrinally that they alone possess the authority from God to claim being the one true church, the Baylor Religious Survey data

reveals that only 12.2% of Catholics view their own faith as the one true church while 78.3% of Latter-day Saints know their church is the only true one. What does the Mormon Church do to effectively instill confidence in this particular doctrine that is lacking in the Catholic Church? Clearly, officially holding to the doctrine has little impact on whether or not members of the church believe it. These are all questions that I believe can be effectively examined within the theoretical framework I have provided.

Interestingly, when you do the same analysis using confidence in religious beliefs in general as a dependent variable, it does a rather poor job of predicting who will have no doubts (Nagelkerke R^2=.023). This seems to indicate that certain factors cause people to become sure about specific doctrines rather than simply producing total confidence in all of the doctrines religion has to offer. Undoubtedly, this provides evidence that religious youth are active in the religious process—evaluating and coming to conclusions about doctrinal content one doctrine at a time.

James Coleman has noted that "[s]ince maintenance of a religious body requires belief and observance in each succeeding generation, a religious body has an interest in fostering in the next generation the beliefs or desires which will maintain the observance" (1990: 600). While this is true, it stands to reason that not just any belief will "lead to actions benefiting others" in the group (1990: 599). Even when they officially sponsor such beliefs, some religious cultures seem to be unable to effectively instill strong confidence in them. Consequently, while all religious groups have a strong interest in retaining in membership and commitment each new

generation born into their respective ranks, only some groups are very successful at actually achieving it. I believe confidence in certain types of religious doctrines plays a key role in the production of religious group solidarity. Here we have discussed a little about where such confidence comes from and it is to its impact that I now turn. Specifically, I will examine whether or not specific doctrines, when strongly believed, serve to promote continued affiliation, donation and service.

Table 3.1: Religious Confidence by Religious Affiliation

	Have "no doubts" that God exists	Believe heaven "absolutely" exists	View own religion as "one true faith"	N
Bible Church	100.0%	100.0%	69.2%	14
Latter-day Saint	100.0%	95.8%	78.3%	22
Baptist	95.9%	93.7%	35.9%	195
Assemblies of God	92.0%	100.0%	73.9%	24
Church of Christ	90.0%	78.9%	41.5%	39
Pentecostal	82.4%	82.4%	18.2%	25
Catholic	73.6%	68.9%	12.2%	361
Methodist	71.7%	74.0%	12.8%	171
Lutheran	64.6%	71.1%	12.0%	120
Presbyterian	63.6%	75.9%	25.5%	70
Episcopal	51.9%	54.9%	7.7%	59
United Church of Christ	50.0%	30.8%	0.0%	17
Congregational	46.2%	35.7%	7.1%	15
Jewish	41.5%	27.0%	10.0%	47
Unitarian Universalist	27.8%	15.8%	0.0%	22
No religion	11.4%	8.7%	NA	192

Source: *Baylor Religion Survey*, 2005

Table 3.2: Descriptions of Variables in the Model

	%	M	SD	Range
Dependent Variables				
Believe in God	83.9			
Definitely believe in afterlife	48.1			
Definitely believe in angels	62.3			
Independent Variables Treated as Interval-Ratio				
Age		15.5	1.4	12.9 to 18.5
Frequency of family talks about religion[a]		3.3	1.7	1 to 6
Frequency with which teen attends church[b]		3.1	2.2	0 to 6
Categorical Independent Variables				
Female	49.6			
No religion	18.4			
Prays regularly with family at meals	52.6			
Prays with parents outside church/mealtime	41.1			
Parents encourage youth group participation "a lot"	41.0			
Has experienced definite answer to prayer	51.2			
Has witnessed miracle from God	47.2			
Has had moving and powerful spiritual experience	51.9			

[a]This is the mean of an ordinal variable coded as follows: 1="never", 2="a few times a year", 3="a few times a month", 4="about once a week", 5="a few times a week", and 6="every day".
[b]This is the mean of an ordinal variable coded as follows: 0="never", 1="a few times a year", 2="many times a year", 3="once a month", 4="2-3 times a month", 5="once a week", and 6="more than once a week".

Table 3.3: Relative Odds of Having High Religious Confidence

	Believe in God	Definitely believe in afterlife	Definitely believe in angels
Controls			
Female	1.43**	.91	1.45***
Age	.95	1.05	.96
No Religion	.53***	1.20	.94
Expressions of Confidence			
Prays regularly with family at meals	1.56**	1.01	1.25*
Prays with parents outside church/mealtime	1.36	1.08	1.09
Parents encourage youth group participation "a lot"	1.35*	1.10	1.10
Frequency of family talks about religion	1.32***	1.17***	1.19***
Frequency with which teen attends church	1.10*	1.09**	1.12***
Religious Efficacy			
Has experienced definite answer to prayer	2.66***	1.55***	1.70***
Has witnessed miracle from God	2.42***	1.54***	2.17***
Emotional Experience			
Has had moving and powerful spiritual experience	1.96***	2.08***	1.81***
Nagelkerke R^2	.396	.202	.298
n =	(3214)	(3210)	(3213)

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level
***Significant at the .001 level

Chapter 4: Confidence-Based Giving

Everything from attending church to giving money or time requires a level of commitment from the religious adherent. Time and money are scarce resources and the idea that religious people simply cannot resist the urge to go to church, give away their money, or spend time doing things that benefit their religion is ridiculous. Each of these actions requires sacrifice. Attending religious services each Saturday or Sunday, for example, restricts the time the faithful have for recreation or to work for pay. Some of these religious services are even commonly considered to be boring by many who attend, yet they go anyway. The point here is that many, if not most, religious people engage in costly religious behaviors even when it is not their favorite thing to do and they might rather be doing something else. Why?

I have suggested that strong faith is an important part of the answer. In the New Testament Epistle of James, chapter 2, verse 17, we read "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." This suggests that religious faith by itself is of little consequence. Obviously, having religious confidence has no sociological significance if it does not drive people to action. In fact, it could be argued that religious faith does not even warrant sociological study unless it in some way determines outward behavior.

Although a review of relevant literature suggests that religious belief does have an impact on certain aspects of religious group solidarity, it has rarely been the primary focus of research done on the subject. The problem of financial giving, in particular, is one of great importance to religious groups. Obviously, if religious

leaders cannot convince people to donate to the church, it is unlikely to survive for very long. Hoge points out that many religious groups in recent history have suffered significant financial crises requiring them to make considerable cutbacks on staff to stay afloat (1994b). If nothing else, this illustrates the need for religious groups to understand what causes financial giving so that they can more effectively promote it.

Variables that have been commonly found to influence religious contribution include children and family, income (Greeley et al., 1976; Morgan, Dye and Hybels 1977; Hoge and Polk 1980; Sullivan 1985; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1990; D'Antonio et al. 1989; Zalenski and Zeck 1992; Donahue 1994; Hoge 1994b; Hoge and Yang 1994; Davidson and Pyle 1994; Luidens and Nemeth 1994; Olson and Caddell 1994; Zaleski et al 1994; Iannacone 1997), age (Hoge 1994b; Hoge and Yang 1994; D'Antonio, et al. 1989; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1988; Hoge and Polk 1980), education (D'Antonio et al. 1989; Greeley and McManus 1987; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Morgan, Dye, and Hybels 1977), church involvement (Iannaccone 1997; Davidson and Pyle 1994; Hoge and Yang 1994; Luidens and Nemeth 1994; Olson and Caddell 1994; Rexhausen and Cieslak 1994; Inskeep 1994; D'Antonio, et al. 1989; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hartley 1984; Greeley et al. 1976), the use of pledging or stewardship programs (Rexhausen and Cieslak 1994; Zaleski et al 1994; Uthe 1991; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986), and congregation size (Zaleski et al 1994; Olson and Caddell 1994; Zaleski and Zech 1992; Sullivan 1985; Cieslak 1984; Hilke 1980). Interestingly, the bulk of the research available on religious giving came in a special

edition of *Review of Religious Research* published almost 15 years ago (Hoge 1994a). Prior to that, not much had been done.

Unfortunately, only a few of the studies I reviewed examined the influence of religious belief on religious giving (Greeley et al 1976; Hoge and Polk 1980; Sullivan 1985; Hoge and Yang 1994; Davidson and Pyle 1994; Luidens and Nemeth 1994; Donahue 1994). While most of them found religious faith to be a significant predictor of financial giving, the variable was never really the center of any theoretical discussion. Donahue, for example, offered no explanation of his finding that giving to one's own congregation was most strongly influenced by income and the religiosity of one's spouse, while personal religiousness and belief more strongly influenced giving to religious charities (1994). In their thorough analysis of the predictors of religious giving, Hoge and Yang found that belief in the existence of life after death, having no doubts that God exists, and literal belief in the Bible all correlated with giving a higher percentage of income to the church among both Catholics and Protestants (1994). Sadly, they never really explained why that should be the case. Likewise, Luidens and Nemeth found that conservative beliefs were associated with higher giving, but offered no reasons about why the two are connected other than to suggest that orthodoxy of belief is a reflection of high tension with society which is known to produce greater commitment (1994).

Davidson and Pyle provided the most promising theoretical discussion of the issue in their study of the factors that promote giving in affluent churches. They found that while religious belief impacts contribution to some degree independently,

its biggest effect occurs indirectly via religious participation. They suggested that beliefs that "reflect both affective and instrumental elements" should be especially important because they not only feed into individual self-concepts, but also express the benefits individuals are receiving from involvement with religion (1994: 184). While this theoretical framework is better than most, Davidson and Pyle still failed to specify exactly what it is about certain beliefs that promote religious giving. Even Iannaccone only used belief as a measure of religiosity, rather than exploring how different beliefs might have a differential impact on giving (1997).

Unfortunately, though several empirical studies include religious belief as a variable, it is rare to find one that attempts to identify the mechanisms that drive strong belief to result in financial giving. Furthermore, most attempts to theoretically connect financial giving to doctrinal content have focused on orthodoxy of belief in general and have not been more specific (Cornwall 1989). Still, while most of the studies done in the past failed to address many important theoretical issues regarding what it is about religion or religiosity that causes individuals to contribute time and resources to their religious groups (Hoge and Griffin 1992), we must give them credit for at least pointing out that there is something about belief that seems to motivate contribution.

Perhaps I find it most troubling that none of the studies on financial contribution that I have seen made any thorough attempt to separate conceptually what is given from what is received by religious participants. Consequently, almost all of the studies reviewed used attendance at religious services and religious

involvement as predictors of giving rather than as another way to give. By doing so, all received large boosts to their predictive power. I believe this form of analysis is misguided. Simply put, these studies do not allow us to effectively distinguish between what is being contributed in terms of time and money and what benefits are being received. Is being allowed to take time out to attend church a benefit or is being expected to sacrifice recreation or work time to attend church a cost?

Conceptually, when it comes to studying adults, I consider attending church to be one of the many types of religious involvement that is a form of contribution rather than a cause of donation. After all, churches do not sell tickets for entry; anyone can attend for free. Even so, in most cases you don't see people beating down the doors to get a seat. Indeed, achieving high attendance at religious services is an accomplishment in its own right and has to be worked for. Many religious groups fail to achieve it. Consequently, I believe church attendance is indicative of an individual's feeling of solidarity with the group. Actually going to church requires commitment beyond what is required to make a simple statement of belonging.

I do not mean to suggest that people who attend religious services do not receive some sort of benefit. However, I believe if researchers insist on using involvement as a causal variable, they must distinguish beneficial involvement from costly involvement. I have tried to remedy this theoretically by identifying certain forms of involvement as mechanisms of confidence building and then using confidence as the determinant of behaviors reflective of group solidarity. In essence, I have separated behaviors that should produce faith from those that faith should

produce. Or more precisely, I have isolated individual behaviors that directly benefit the group from those that do not.

Members who give financial donations or hours of service to their groups are giving up their own scarce resources with no guarantee that they will ever get them back. Volunteering for a religious group is also a costly way to be involved, as it takes valuable time an individual could be investing in himself and provides it to the church. Of course, some forms of church involvement could be considered as purely beneficial and consequently as a cause of religious giving. Group parties where food is served for free come to mind as one example.

Since the special 1994 edition of *Review of Religious Research*, theories about religious commitment have come a long way. The religious economies model in particular has been developed considerably and has offered much to the discussion of religious commitment (Stark 2003; Stark 2001; Stark and Finke 2000; Iannaccone 1997; Hoge, et al. 1995). Still, Iannoccone's suggestion that actual "theories of religious giving are few and far between" still holds true (1997), and the religious economies model needs continual development and specification as well. This is one of the objectives I am hoping to accomplish here using some of the most recent data on religious giving.

In addition to completing an updated empirical analysis of the determinants of religious giving, service, and attendance, I hope to also solidify the importance of identifying specifically how and why certain beliefs promote religious group solidarity. I have presented the idea that it is flawed to think that having religious

faith always results in greater religiosity and volunteerism. I contend that the content and strength of faith have important implications for determining the kind of behaviors in which people are willing to engage.

Strong faith that God does not care what human beings do as long as it makes them happy, for example, will not necessarily result in increased commitment to a religious group. Having knowledge of the presence of such a belief would not help us predict behavior. In contrast, having confidence that God requires compliance with the Ten Commandments should be more likely to produce particular behavioral outcomes that can be predicted. Using this logic, I identify some specific beliefs that should have implications for religious group solidarity. Then I empirically analyze whether or not they do while controlling for other variables commonly deemed to be important in the literature.

THE DOCTRINES OF FAITH-BASED SOLIDARITY

While I have related a summary of the research conducted on the impact of religious belief on religious giving, I have also noted that there has been very little theoretical discussion of the mechanisms that actually cause belief to produce giving. In fact, most of the research cited above uses belief variables as more of an afterthought than as a theoretical necessity. My research is attempting to further advance knowledge in this area by theoretically identifying and explaining the mechanisms that cause belief to produce certain types of religious behavior I have argued are indicative of the presence of religious group solidarity.

As suggested in chapter two, religious groups can promote several types of doctrines that should relate to religious group solidarity. This chapter empirically examines three of them (Propositions 1, 2 and 6). First, doctrines that *assert the existence of supernatural resources* should influences member dependence and thus impact religious group solidarity. As mentioned previously, supernatural resources include any powers, privileges, rewards, incentives, or sanctions that can only be obtained from or utilized through objects or entities outside the known empirical realm. No matter how substantial the secular benefits a group can offer might be, they can never equal the worth of certain otherworldly rewards. Accordingly, religious groups that offer access to compelling supernatural resources, in addition to social ones, should be most capable of maximizing member benefits and thus their dependence on the group. Individuals who are sure that supernatural resources are there and obtainable should be the most motivated to donate to and serve their religious groups.

Second, religious doctrines that *promote exclusivity* should foster member group solidarity (Stark 2001). If group members believe they can use the supernatural resources they want by appealing to any religious group, it is much easier for them to switch religions. Consequently, the most effective way for a religious group to ensure absolute dependence on their group is to convince members that what they have to offer in the form of supernatural resources cannot be obtained anywhere else, not even from another denomination adhering to the same worldview—be it Christian, Buddhist or Muslim. Groups that claim they are the one

true way to salvation can more effectively maximize solidarity. Individuals who have confidence they belong to the one true church should be most likely to contribute to it. I suspect this will be one of the most important predictors of religious solidarity as it is the most group-specific way to achieve dependence.

Third, belief in doctrines that *depict a God that monitors human behavior* should increase solidarity by decreasing the cost of formal control (Hechter 1987). If group members believe that God is aware of and involved in their lives, then logically they must comply with religious rules or face sanctions from the ultimate monitor of their actions. For someone who believes in a God who knows what they are doing, free riding is not as much of an option because they cannot avoid detection of their deviance. Group members who believe in such a God should be more likely to use self-control, and thus the need for formal controls is largely eliminated. Even in the absence of human monitoring, they will be more likely to attend, donate to, and serve their respective religious groups.

Unfortunately, the dataset I am using does not include measures that allow me to directly examine the importance of having confidence that compliance and contribution are required to access supernatural resources, and consequently Proposition 5 will only be superficially tested at this time. Propositions 3, 4, and 7 also lie beyond the scope of the current analysis but will be addressed in the next chapter.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used for this investigation were obtained from the Baylor Religion Survey (Baylor, 2005). To my knowledge this is the most recent nationally representative survey of adults focused on religious beliefs and behaviors. The Gallup Organization conducted this survey using a mixed-mode sampling design that included telephone and self-administered mailed surveys. Random-digit dialing was used to identify 1,002 households. The adult (age 18 and over) who had the most recent birthday was asked for an interview. After this initial interview, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in an important study on American values and beliefs. They were offered $5.00 to complete a self-administered questionnaire. Out of the 660 who agreed to participate, 603 also agreed to disclose a mailing address and received the questionnaire.

Gallup mailed an additional 2,000 questionnaires to a database of households that had been previously selected using random-digit dialing. All respondents were recruited between October 7th and November 1st 2005. 2,603 questionnaires were mailed to adults who agreed to participate in the study. A letter was sent to each household thanking them for agreeing to participate and providing contact information in case they had any questions. A reminder postcard was mailed to any who did not respond to the initial mailing and a second complete packet was also sent. 1,721 of the 2,603 surveys mailed were returned for a final response rate based on the total sample contacted of 46.5% (for more information see Bader, Mencken and Froese 2007).

Religious Group Solidarity

As indicated above, I measure religious group solidarity along three distinct dimensions—affiliation, donation and service. While *affiliation* in the form of retention rates will be examined more specifically in the following chapter, here I use religious attendance as another indicator of solidarity. While simply staying in the group is perhaps the weakest form of religious group solidarity, attending religious services is another more easily measurable way for members to show their support for their religion. In this case, I am considering attendance as a stronger form of affiliation than simply stating ones status as a member of a group. In the Baylor Religion Survey, respondents were asked "How often do you attend religious services?" Answers were coded at the ordinal level, where 1 indicated an individual never attended church and 9 was an indication that they attended church "several times a week".

Donation is measured in thousand dollar increments. Participants were asked how much money they and other family members in their household contributed to their "current place of worship" during the last year. I recoded $0-1,000 as 1, $1,001-2,000 as 2 and so forth up to 10, which was an indication of a family that donated $10,000 or more. Consequently, while we cannot be sure of the extent of giving above $10,000, it accounts for less than 3% of respondents answering this question. I believe direct interpretation of the effects on this dependent variable can be suitably, though cautiously, made. Of course, respondents who reported never attending church (N=385) were not asked about the size of their donation to their "current

place of worship" because they did not have one. Consequently, the number of cases included in the analysis of donation was considerably reduced (see Table 3.1).

In chapter 2 I defined the service aspect of solidarity in terms of the amount of time and labor individuals voluntarily invest in support of their religious group and its members. Considering this definition, I believe there are three separate variables that are suitable and relevant indicators of member service. The first relates to volunteering time for the church. Respondents were asked about how many hours per month they volunteer for their church. Unfortunately, answers in the survey were not coded in similar sized categories and thus I have opted to use a dichotomous measure indicating those who do volunteer (1) and those who do not (0).

Responses to the question of how often participants share their faith with their friends and also strangers is my second and third measures of service. While the volunteerism aspect of religious service has been examined in previous research (Hoge, et al. 1998; Hoge and Yang 1994), I have not come across any studies that examine member willingness to simply take time to share their faith with friends or strangers. However, there is perhaps no better way to support one's group than to tell other people about it. This is akin to free advertising for the religion and can go a long way to helping recruit new members. I believe that faith sharing is another important aspect of service that religious people can offer to their group. Both of the variables I am examining were also recoded to be binary, 1 indicating that survey subjects do share their faith and 0 indicating they do not share it.

Religious Confidence

An obvious problem with most of the research on the relationship between belief and behavior is that it neglects to examine variation in strength of belief. In too many studies, belief is measured in terms of its presence or absence. In reality, the confidence people have in their beliefs exists on a continuous spectrum. Thus far, I have tried to orient my measures in terms of confidence versus doubt. However, due to the constraints of data, it has been necessary for me to often measure confidence dichotomously. While this does not represent the range of variation necessary to account for all of the impact of confidence on human action, it does provide a starting point that I believe is better than simply accounting for the presence or absence of belief. Fortunately, in this analysis I have two ordinal variables of confidence that provide us with a chance to look at a greater range of variation, though not as much as I would like.

The theory presented here points to several specific doctrines that when not doubted, should increase member willingness to donate, serve, and affiliate. The three that will be examined here include the existence of supernatural resources, belonging to the only church that has access to those resources, and the reality of a God who is involved and monitoring human behavior.

Perhaps the supernatural resource sought most often is heaven. Therefore, answers to the question asking individuals to state what they believe about the existence of heaven are used to measure this concept. Responses were situated on a scale on which "absolutely not" was coded as "1", "probably not" as "2", "probably"

as "3", and "absolutely" was "4". I particularly like how this question offered respondents a chance to claim that they "absolutely" believe in the existence of heaven. This suggests a very high degree of confidence. I expect to find that *those who more absolutely believe in the existence of heaven will contribute more to their religions financially, attend church more often, be more likely to volunteer, and be more likely to share their faith with others than those who do have doubts* (Hypothesis 1).

While God might often be considered the ultimate supernatural resource, people's views about what God is like should shape their willingness to contribute more than just whether or not they believe a God exists (Stark and Finke 2000). A distant God will not have the same power to motivate giving as one who is close and involved. Confidence that God is monitoring behavior is measured as responses to the question of whether God is likely to be directly involved in the personal affairs of the participant ("involved in my affairs"). Response categories for this item range from 1–strongly disagree to 5–strongly agree. Consequently, higher values are used as an indication of more confidence in this view of God and lower values as an indicator of less confidence. While the study also included questions about God being involved in "human affairs" in general, I opted to use the more intimate measure. I believe this is the measure most reflective of whether or not a person believes that God is monitoring her personal life. I expect to find that *those who more strongly agree that God is involved in their personal affairs will contribute*

more financially to their religion, attend church more often, be more likely to volunteer, and be more likely to share their faith with others (Hypothesis 2).

As expressed earlier, an exclusive commitment to one, single religion should have implications for religious giving. I believe this is the most important of all the current belief variables because it is the most group-specific. The Baylor Religion Survey asked respondents about their view of religious salvation and gave them the option of answering "My religion is the 1/true faith that leads to salvation" (coded as 1). Though I would prefer a greater range of variation, this is almost an ideal measure of member confidence that they belong to the only place with access to the supernatural resource of salvation. The response categories "I do not believe in religious salvation" and "Many religions lead to salvation" were coded as 0. I expected to find *that those who have confidence that they belong to the only religion that leads to salvation will contribute more to their religion, attend church more often, be more likely to volunteer, and be more likely to share their faith with others* (Hypothesis 3).

Religious Affiliation

I have included religious affiliation categories into my analysis in order to try to control for other institutional factors (membership requirements, organizational characteristics, officially declared doctrines, etc.) associated with certain religions that might impact religious group solidarity. Following the coding scheme used in the Baylor Religion Survey, I created dummy variables for Catholic, Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Jewish, other religion. Since

denominations within each of these categories do not share identical institutional characteristics, this is not a perfect solution by any means. However, it should still allow us to get a sense of the impact of religious confidence on religious giving and service independent of other institutional factors. Catholic is the reference group. Those having "no religion" (N=181), while asked whether or not they volunteer for the church, showed no variation on this variable and consequently were excluded from the analysis[1]. Likewise, as noted earlier, respondents who do not affiliate with religion are not included in the analysis of financial donation because they were not asked about it.

Background Characteristics

There are many demographic characteristics that have been identified as being significantly correlated with religiosity and religious commitment. I have tried to include as many of these as possible as controls. Research has consistently shown that older people give more and that family related factors are important in determining who volunteers and gives to their group (Hoge and Yang 1994; D'Antonio, et al. 1989; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1988; Hoge and Polk 1980). Thus, I have included age and number of children under 18 as interval ratio variables, and a dummy variable has been included indicated whether or not the respondent is married.

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[1] When the "no religion" dummy variable was included in the analysis of volunteerism, it produced unrealistic slope and standard error outcomes (s.d.>3,000), which clearly indicated it was problematic when paired with the volunteering variable. A subsequent cross-tabulation revealed the source of the problem to be that 100% of respondents who claimed having no religion did not volunteer.

People with more education have also been shown to be more giving to religion (D'Antonio et al. 1989; Greeley and McManus 1987; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Morgan, Dye, and Hybels 1977). To control for education, I have included dummy variables for those with some college education, a bachelor's degree, and a graduate degree, the reference group in this case being those who have never attended college.

Income has always been found to impact financial donations to religious groups (Greeley et al., 1976; Morgan, Dye and Hybels 1977; Hoge and Polk 1980; Sullivan 1985; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Hdgkinson and Weitzman 1990; D'Antonio et al. 1989; Zalenski and Zeck 1992; Hoge and Yang 1994; Davidson and Pyle 1994; Donahue 1994; Iannacone 1997). Consequently, dummy variables are included for three separate categories of income including $35,001-50,000, $50,001-100,000, and over $100,000. The reference group for the income dummy variables includes any who earned $35,000 or less a year. Dummy variables have also been created to account for sex and race. A statistical description of all of the variables included in the analysis can be found in Table 4.1.

Analytic Strategy

My data analysis consists of primarily two steps. First, I isolate the effects of having religious confidence on religious giving and church attendance by employing each as dependent variables in a multiple linear regression. The fact that the family contribution variable is coded in $1,000 increments allows for some direct interpretation of the effects of each determinant. While direct interpretation is not

possible with the attendance variable, I believe the ordinal level indicator has sufficient variation to warrant an effective analysis of the relative effects of each predictor variable. Second, I demonstrate the impact of each predictor variable on faith sharing and volunteerism by conducting binary logistic regression analysis on each of the three dichotomous measures of service.

RESULTS

Financial Donation and Church Attendance

Table 4.2 provides multivariate estimates of predictor effects on the expected value of money donated to the church. In agreement with Hypothesis 1, confidence in the existence of heaven is a significant factor producing higher donations and more frequent church attendance. When controlling for all other factors, each level of increase in confidence that heaven exists increases respondents' contributions to their place of worship over $400 a year. Consequently, the most confident individuals (those indicating they absolutely believe heaven exists) give, on average, over $1,300 more a year to their churches than those who responded that heaven absolutely does not exist[2].

[2] According to Prospect Theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979) when outcomes are certain and positive, people tend to prefer certainty to risk. However, when a perceived outcome is negative, people prefer risk to certainty. In other words, people like certain gain over probable gain and probable loss over certain loss. Ultimately, human beings seem to have a greater aversion to certain loss. One implication of this is that belief in hell might be a greater motivating force than belief in Heaven. Due to collinearity issues between belief in heaven and hell (Pearson's r=.836), it was not prudent to include both variables in the present analysis. However, a separate analysis was done in which confidence in the existence of hell was substituted for confidence in the existence of heaven. With donation as the dependent variable, confidence in hell was statistically significant but caused almost no noticeable difference in the effects of the other variables in the analysis. The new model displayed identical predictive power as well (r^2=.252). Additionally, the beta-weights indicated that the other two confidence variables were actually slightly more important predictors of the dependent

Likewise, Hypothesis 2 is supported. In fact, as we can see from the standardized beta scores, when it comes to church donation, confidence that one belongs to the one true church is only exceeded in its predictive power by income and being an evangelical Protestant versus a Catholic. Having confidence that the one true church has been found is the most important predictor of frequent church attendance with a beta score of .24, with having no religious affiliation coming in a close second as a negative predictor (-.22). Those who believe they belong to the one true church that can offer salvation donate on average over $800 more a year than those who are not as sure.

Hypothesis 3 is also found to be supported by the analysis. Stronger agreement that God is directly involved in one's affairs has a significant, positive effect on both financial giving and church attendance. In both cases, the religious confidence measures are among the strongest determinants of donation and church attendance, lending good support to the importance of religious confidence in producing religious group solidarity. As expected, income is the strongest predictor of financial donation to religion. It makes sense that people who make more money can give more money. Unfortunately, these data did not allow me to do a similar regression using percentage donated as my dependent variable. I suspect, however, that the effects of income would be diminished, if not eliminated, should such an

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variable than was confidence in the existence of hell. Consistent with my model, having confidence in the existence of the supernatural resource "hell" does seem to have the capacity to impact group solidarity, just as belief in heaven does. However, these data provide little evidence to suggest that belief in hell is more likely to induce action than belief in heaven. The same conclusion was true when attendance was substituted as the dependent variable. Future research should explore these relationships more fully.

analysis be conducted. Some research suggests the effects might even be reversed (Hoge and Yang 1994).

Compared to Catholics, evangelical and mainline Protestants and those in the "other religion" category seem to be more prone to financial giving, though not to more frequent church attendance. This suggests that there may be additional institutional or theological factors that influence solidarity that need to be explored. Having children under 18 and being married do positively impact church attendance, but seem to have little to do with financial donation. Interestingly, when controlling for all other variables, more education seems to be related to more frequent church attendance. People with both bachelor's and graduate degrees are significantly more likely to attend church frequently than those with no college experience. Age is also shown to be a positive predictor of both attendance and donation, though not one of the most substantial ones. Overall, the model presented accounts for over 25% of the variance in financial giving to religion and almost 45% of the variance in church attendance frequency.

Volunteering and Faith Sharing

Examining the results of the three logistic regressions conducted to measure the impact of religious confidence on service, we find similar support for all three of my hypotheses (Table 4.3). Compared to those with weaker belief in heaven, people who are sure heaven exists are considerably more likely to volunteer for their churches and share their faith with friends and strangers, lending support to Hypothesis 1. The relative odds of volunteering increase 227% for those who believe

they belong to the one true religion, while believers in this principle are almost three times more likely to share their faith with friends and are two times more likely to share it with strangers. This supports Hypothesis 2. In support of Hypothesis 3, we find that greater confidence that God is directly involved in personal affairs also significantly increases the odds that a person will share her faith with others and volunteer her time to the church, though it doesn't seem to have as much an impact as confidence in heaven or exclusive religion.

Examining religious affiliation and the background characteristics, we find that volunteerism is significantly influenced by being married and having children under 18. While these family characteristics increase the odds of volunteering, neither impacts the likelihood that faith sharing will occur. It may be that volunteering is required to receive certain services that the church has to offer, such as child care. Women are more likely than men to engage in all three behaviors, while age seems to have little effect on any of them. Compared to whites, African Americans are significantly more like to share their faith with both friends and strangers.

Interestingly, compared to those with low incomes, having an income over $50,000 seems to considerably discourage sharing with strangers. In fact, people in the higher income brackets are about half as likely to share their faith with strangers as individuals making less than $35,000 a year. So, while wealthy people might donate more money, they do not seem as willing to be vocal about what they believe, especially to strangers. This may reflect certain social pressures that accompany

being a member of a higher social class. Having a graduate degree is shown to encourage faith sharing with friends, those attaining that much education being almost three times more likely to share than people with no college experience.

The potential that additional institutional effects might help us to explain religious service is demonstrated here as well. Of course, it is no surprise to see that, compared to being Catholic, being evangelical Protestant greatly increases the odds that one will share his faith with others, given the emphasis such groups put on evangelizing. Being Protestant in general seems to have a positive effect on volunteerism when compared to Catholics. Still, even when holding religious affiliation constant, people's confidence that heaven exists, that God is involved, and that they belong to the one church that can offer salvation are strong determinants of whether or not a person will volunteer and share her faith with others.

The pseudo R^2 statistics for all three of these regressions were quite substantial, indicating the model as a whole does a good job of accounting for the factors that produce the behaviors in question. While several other variables are significant, all three of the explanatory variables are sizeable contributors to the outcomes measured. Of course, there is still much variation to be explained.

A Brief Look at Required Contribution

Looking across denominations, a tremendous amount of variation exists when it comes to financial donation, volunteering and faith sharing (Table 4.4). Unfortunately, the data do no allow me to measure directly whether or not respondents believe contributing financially, volunteering, and faith sharing are

absolutely necessary to receive access to supernatural resources. However, it is well known that different religious denominations have very different ideas about what they should require of their members. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, require individuals to share their faith with other people if they desire to be in good standing with the group. Mormons are required to give 10% of their incomes by a commandment from God. Jews put little emphasis on recruitment of new members from outside the group and are often content to focus on people who are Jewish by birth. Given these differences in content, my theory predicts that *Mormons contribute more money to their religion than most*, *Jehovah's Witnesses spend more time telling people about their faith than most,* and *Jews should be some of the least likely to share their faith with others*. While there were not enough Jehovah's Witnesses in the sample to include them, the other two predictions are verified by the data.

As Table 4.4 shows, Latter-day Saints, in fact, donate almost twice as much as members of the next most giving group, the Church of Christ (about $4,000 compared to $2,000 a year). Also consistent with the theory, Jews are among the least likely to share their faith with friends and strangers. While this only scratches the surface of what needs to be examined, it does provide some sense that each group's content impacts it own outcomes. In the future, I hope to conduct a more thorough analysis of religious confidence in group specific doctrines and how they impact religious group solidarity.

CHEAP SOLIDARITY

Evidence has been found for all of my hypotheses. I have shown that religious confidence is an independent and significant determinant of my measures of religious group solidarity. In most cases, it is also among the strongest of predictors. However, I believe the most important finding of the current analysis is that confidence that one has found the only true church with salvation is the biggest factor of all three beliefs specified in determining all but one of the forms of solidarity measured. I think this is important because few denominations actually claim to have access to the only path that leads to salvation. Most, for example, assert that affiliation with Christianity is essential, but hesitate to strongly promote their own denomination as the one with exclusive truth or divine authority.

The evidence here suggests that exclusive access to supernatural resources is an important claim to make and convince members of if a group wants to maximize religious donation, church attendance, volunteerism, and faith sharing. The member who knows she cannot find salvation in any other religious organization is the most dependent of all religious affiliates. She has nowhere else to go if she wants to obtain supernatural resources. Her dependence on the group is immeasurable.

Additionally, the believer who is sure that God is involved in and aware of his personal actions cannot get away with anything. People who truly believe God is watching have an extra layer of monitoring that requires no manpower and consequently lowers the cost of control (Hechter 1987). This suggests that religious

groups can, at least to some degree, effectively deal with the free rider problem by instilling confidence in this doctrine (Olson 1965).

The data here are also consistent with the explanation that the perceived risk of failing to support a religious group is higher when there is absolute surety that heaven exists and the group can get you there. Ultimately, this analysis might be the most compelling evidence yet that religious group solidarity is at some level a function of uncertainty reduction (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1995; Montgomery 1992). To religious adherents who *know* Heaven exists and that they belong to the only religion that can provide them the means of obtaining it, there is no risk to sacrificing for the group. As long as group members have absolute confidence that making sacrifices is necessary to achieve what they want and that God will know if they do not comply, there is tremendous loss involved in the failure to sacrifice. Consequently, if religious groups can strengthen member belief about how promoting group ends yields eternal rewards, there is no limit to what they can ask members to do. On the other hand, to the doubtful affiliate, there is always a chance that giving up the money will yield no return. As long as he has doubts, religion is a risky venture and the likelihood he will give should be diminished.

Of course, content is also key. Religious groups that convince members that they should pursue the joy of God in their own way, or that how they choose to contribute is entirely up to them, might well have very confident members, but their confidence will be in content that is not solidarity-producing. Likewise, there is nothing for the *nonbeliever* to gain by giving to a religion except some worldly

benefits that can probably be obtained by giving even less time and money to other groups. The confident, on the other hand, know they have salvation to gain if they sacrifice for the group and thus are willing to contribute a great deal more.

Imagine the implications. Just by shaping their doctrines and practices in specific ways, religious groups can increase their attendance, can get hundreds or even thousands more dollars and hours in donations from each member, and can mobilize consistent and voluntary recruitment efforts. In essence, they can greatly enhance group solidarity and growth—all without spending a dime.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted here further supports previous research that has found belief to be connected to religious giving and volunteerism. However, unlike previous research, I have provided the theoretical underpinnings of exactly how and why specific religious doctrines, when believed, impact donation and service in predicted ways. Additionally, I have shifted the focus from belief versus nonbelief to confidence versus doubt. I think this is an important contribution that should guide future research.

It may be that under circumstances where the presence of religious belief is found to be insignificant, variations in religious confidence would be significant. I encourage researchers to measure the strength of religious belief with a greater range of variation, specifically in terms of doubt and absence of doubt or knowledge and absence of knowledge, thus making more precise studies of the impact of religious confidence possible. The weakness of my study is that it does not adequately account

for other institutional factors that might affect donation and service. The data did not allow me to effectively do this. While religious affiliation by itself is a start, a more complete analysis would require the inclusion of measures of more specific institutional characteristics.

So, why do religious people give up their own resources to benefit their respective religious groups? I have shown that their faith is an important part of the answer. Certain religious beliefs specified theoretically are significant predictors of religious attendance, donation, and service, even when controlling for a whole host of other variables deemed to be important. Thus, it seems that religious confidence in specific doctrines can have an important effect on religious group solidarity. It may be that religion often serves to effectively suppress or reorder individual preferences to be consistent with ideals that promote the ends of the religious group. Perhaps religious faith is a fundamental reflection of this process.

These findings underscore the importance of examining specific beliefs and the impact they can have on all forms of behavior. If we know what a person believes and how strongly he believes it, we can in essence better predict which behaviors will be most reasonable from his point of view and thus what he will be most likely to do. The fact that people give because they are confident of things that cannot be empirically verified does not make the giving irrational unless the beliefs they have cannot be reconciled with sensible giving.

Ultimately, this type of analysis should not be limited to just religious confidence or religious forms of behavior. While I have focused on typical religious

behaviors here, I see no reason why these same theoretical principles could not be applied to more extreme religious behavior such as suicide bombing or even secular behaviors such as political activism or environmentalism. I suspect that my theory can be applied to these areas and that an examination of the origins and impact of confidence in secular information can yield productive results as well. I briefly discuss some of these possibilities in the concluding chapter.

The next chapter will explore the impact of several yet unexplored causal variables outlined in the second chapter to determine their effectiveness at predicting retention rates of religious Jews in the United States. Like receiving financial support, having members that remain affiliated with the group is of ultimate importance to religions. If group members cannot be effectively retained, a religious group cannot survive. It is to the fate of American Judaism that I turn.

Table 4.1: Descriptions of Variables in the Model

	%	M	SD	Range	Valid N
Dependent Variables					
Donation (in thousands of dollars)		1.3	2.3	0 to 10[a]	1235
Attendance[b]		4.9	2.9	1 to 9	1699
Volunteer for church	31.7				1629
Share faith with friends	34.9				1641
Share faith with strangers	21.6				1641
Interval-Ratio Independent Variables					
Age		49.8	16.6	18 to 93	1692
# of children under 18		0.6	1.0	0 to 8	1656
God directly involved[c]		3.5	1.4	1 to 5	1556
Heaven exists[d]		3.4	.9	1 to 4	1674
Categorical Independent Variables					
Female	52.9				1721
Black	8.0				1682
Other Race	5.6				1682
Married	56.9				1694
Income $35,001-50,000	18.7				1616
Income $50,001-100,000	31.9				1616
Income over $100,000	17.4				1616
Some College	38.7				1693
Bachelor's Degree	18.6				1693
Graduate Degree	16.1				1693
Black Protestant	5.0				1679
Evangelical Protestant	33.6				1679
Mainline Protestant	22.1				1679
Jewish	2.5				1679
Other	4.9				1679
No Religion	10.8				1679
One True Religion	20.6				1661

[a] 10 is coded as $10,000 or more

[b] This is the mean of an ordinal variable coded as follows: 1="never", 2="less than once a year", 3="Once or twice a year", 4= "several times a year", 5="once a month", 6="2-3 times a month", 7="about weekly", 8="weekly", and 9="several times a week"

[c] This is the mean of an ordinal variable coded as follows: 1="strongtly disagree", 2="disagree", 3="undecided", 4="agree", and 5="strongly agree"

[d] This is the mean of an ordinal variable coded as follows: 1="absolutely not", 2="probably not", 3="probably", 4="absolutely"

Table 4.2: Determinants of Financial Donation and Church Attendance

	Financial Donation		Church Attendance	
	B	Beta	B	Beta
Background Characteristics				
Age	.01	.08*	.02	.09***
Female	-.25	-.05	.24	.04*
Black	.00	.00	-.15	-.01
Other Race	-.51	-.05	.02	.00
Married	.23	.05	.62	.11***
# Children under 18	.00	.00	.16	.06*
Income $35,001-50,000	.42	.07*	-.20	-.03
Income $50,001-100,000	1.05	.21***	-.03	-.01
Income over $100,000	2.27	.37***	-.08	-.01
Some College	-.10	-.02	.28	.05
Bachelor's Degree	.28	.05	.72	.10***
Graduate Degree	.39	.06	.92	.12***
Religious Affiliation				
Black Protestant	.81	.08	.58	.04
Evangelical Protestant	1.04	.21***	-.07	-.01
Mainline Protestant	.55	.10**	-.16	-.02
Jewish	.86	.05	-.45	-.02
Other	1.42	.14***	-.09	-.01
No Religion	NA	NA	-1.93	-.22***
Religious Confidence				
Heaven Exists	.44	.12**	.63	.20***
One True Religion	.81	.15***	1.75	.24***
God Directly Involved	.22	.11**	.39	.19***
R^2		.252		.436
n =		(965)		(1327)

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level
***Significant at the .001 level

Table 4.3: Determinants of Church Service and Promotion (Logistic Regression Odds Ratios)

	Volunteers for Church	Shares Faith with Friends	Shares Faith with Strangers
Background Characteristics			
Age	1.01	1.00	1.00
Female	1.32*	1.84***	1.47*
Black	.83	3.60**	3.11**
Other Race	.47*	2.18*	1.77
Married	1.80***	1.17	1.04
# Children under 18	1.33***	1.08	.94
Income $35,001-50,000	1.24	.83	.73
Income $50,001-100,000	.76	.64*	.53**
Income over $100,000	.96	.68	.47**
Some College	.87	1.38	.72
Bachelor's Degree	1.12	1.32	.76
Graduate Degree	2.01**	2.70***	1.34
Religious Affiliation			
Black Protestant	4.59**	1.25	1.89
Evangelical Protestant	1.85**	2.57***	3.13***
Mainline Protestant	2.44***	1.78**	1.54
Jewish	1.50	.54	2.33
Other	2.41*	2.19*	3.10**
No Religion	NA	.61	1.37
Religious Confidence			
Heaven Exists	2.25***	1.86***	1.71**
One True Religion	2.27***	2.86***	1.95***
God Directly Involved	1.24**	1.66***	1.51***
Nagelkerke R^2	.312	.425	.307
n =	(1184)	(1354)	(1353)

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level
***Significant at the .001 level

Table 4.4: Denominational Variation in Donation and Service

	Average Donation (in thousands)	% Who Volunteer for Church	% Who Share Faith with Friends	% Who Share Faith with Strangers	N
Latter-day Saint	3.93	87.0	81.8	50.0	22
Church of Christ	1.99	36.1	42.9	28.6	39
Baptist	1.65	47.6	59.6	40.3	195
Assemblies of God	1.50	43.5	62.5	37.5	24
Episcopal	1.49	41.2	40.8	12.0	59
Presbyterian	1.43	38.9	35.3	13.5	70
United Church of Christ	1.30	41.7	36.4	9.1	17
Methodist	1.24	38.2	32.9	17.2	171
Bible Church	1.17	54.5	69.2	38.5	14
Lutheran	1.01	37.2	33.3	19.6	120
Pentecostal	.93	37.1	77.4	71.0	25
Congregational	.80	30.8	15.4	15.4	15
Jewish	.76	10.8	7.7	10.3	47
Catholic	.63	24.1	21.6	10.5	361
No religion	.39	3.4	5.5	4.9	192
Unitarian Universalist	.34	11.1	15.8	15.8	22

Source: *Baylor Religion Survey*, 2005

Chapter 5: Retaining a Community[1]

Retaining members is a central challenge for any religious group. A recent Pew Forum report indicated that 1 in 10 Americans is a former Catholic, and 44% of all Americans have switched religious affiliations, become affiliated after being raised without religion, or have left religion altogether (Pew Forum 2008). The report also shows incredible variation in the ability of groups to hold on to their members. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, were found to have the lowest retention rates (37% of children retained) and Hindus the highest (84% of children retained). It seems that retaining adherents may be a lot more challenging for religious groups than previously thought.

Judaism has proved to be one of the world's most enduring religions. Until recently, it was a rare historical event for Jews to live in a context free of widespread persecution and discrimination. However, during the past 150 years, almost half of the world's Jews immigrated to the United States. While it is true that American Jews have been subjected to prejudice and intolerance, it seems clear that compared to previous circumstances, the religious freedom and ethnic diversity found in America have provided Jews with the fewest obstacles to cultural integration. Assuming that there are few remaining external barriers to religious assimilation for Jews in the United States, a fundamental question arises: Why do some Jews exit Judaism, while others choose to stay with the religion?

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[1] A version of this chapter was published under the title "Retention Strategies and Religious Success: A Regional Comparison of American Jews" in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1 (2005) Article 12: www.religjournal.com.

One of the major themes in the literature about American Judaism is that the reformulation of Jewish theology and practice instigated by some Jewish leaders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was necessary to strengthen the religion (Barkai 1994; Feingold 1999; Glazer 1972; Gold 1999; Goldscheider 1995; Silverstein 1994). The traditional inward-looking and exclusive Jewish religion with its constant focus on strict ritual observance, the coming of a Messiah, and a book of law dictated by God to Moses was assumed to be incompatible with American political and cultural pluralism and modern thought in general. Reformers believed that if Jews were required to continue in their traditional ways, they would only become disillusioned and leave the faith.

The effort to reevaluate American Judaism was instigated largely by German immigrants influenced by Jewish emancipation and the Enlightenment in Europe. They came to the United States in the 1840s and 1850s and brought with them Reform Judaism and the belief that to survive in modern times, Jews must continually adapt. Around the turn of the century, as large numbers of Eastern European Jews arrived in the United States, German Jews actively urged them to adopt a new form of Judaism (Glazer 1972; Gold 1999).

Initially, the reforms promoted by German Jews were limited to basic changes that made synagogues seem more like Protestant churches. These adjustments included new rules of synagogue etiquette and decorum, "aesthetic improvements" to the synagogue, the use of English during synagogue services, and regular Protestant-like sermons—changes that Sarna (1995: 222) argues "could be

justified on the basis of Jewish law." Indeed, many Jewish houses of worship came to closely resemble Protestant churches with "stained-glass windows, organs, and Sunday worship—features not part of the Jewish tradition" (Glazer 1972; Gold 1999: 14).

For many reformers, these cosmetic adjustments were not enough. Glazer describes that "the thoroughgoing rationalism of the Reform leaders put them in opposition to the complex structure of Jewish ritual practice." Thus it is no surprise that they also "attacked and eliminated every ceremony, every ritual, [and] every prayer that did not immediately and in a rather simple-minded way conform to their view of the truth (as defined by nineteenth-century scholarship) and so serve for spiritual and ethical uplift." Ultimately, traditional rituals and customs were "denounced as superstition," and "any prayer that could not be believed literally was branded a lie no self-respecting man should be asked to repeat" (Glazer 1972: 50).

As a consequence of the efforts of Jewish reformers, a division emerged that resulted in two very different ways of adhering to Judaism. This division goes beyond a simple separation of Jews into Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox categories. Indeed, some Orthodox Jews are more observant than others, just as some self-identified Reform Jews adhere to fairly orthodox practices (Heilman and Cohen 1989). Therefore, it is more useful to consider adherents to Judaism as existing along a continuum. At one end of the spectrum are Jews who adopt a traditional form of faith. To these Jews, concentrating on learning and adhering to religious doctrines and performing sacred rituals as commanded by God are of utmost importance and

will bring them spiritual blessings. The other end of the spectrum consists of Jews who tend to leave the old traditions behind and embrace a form of Judaism that is less doctrinaire and less exclusive. Jews who adhere to this way of being Jewish are less likely to participate in costly religious rituals and practices and often deny the divine origins of traditional Jewish doctrines.

While many researchers have examined the persistence of Judaism in the United States, very little empirical work has been done to uncover whether or not a retention strategy based on offering a less restrictive version of Judaism is more effective than a strategy that promotes the traditional, spiritual, and ritual-oriented form of adherence. Do individuals remain devoted to religious groups that are more socially open, or do intense rituals and other exclusive practices result in member retention?

In this chapter, I evaluate hypotheses based on competing explanations about religious retention to investigate whether observance of traditional Jewish practices has a different impact on Jewish retention rates than does the acceptance of a less costly, socially oriented Judaism. Specifically, I examine the variable retention rates observed between Jews living on the U.S. East and West Coasts. I conclude that the data provide evidence that a retention strategy that promotes investment in inimitable religious capital, requires members to reject or adopt detectable outward practice, and serves to socially encapsulate members provides a stronger basis for religious group persistence.

MODES OF RELIGIOUS PERSISTENCE

The debate about whether a more socially open form of Judaism can retain adherents better than a Judaism that requires strict observance of traditional religious practices resembles a more general theoretical discussion about what is necessary for religious group persistence. As with most groups, one of the central objectives of any religious group is to survive. Surviving, at a minimum, requires maintaining a collection of individuals who claim membership in the group. Thus, while affiliation might be considered the weakest aspect of solidarity, it is also the most fundamental aspect. Generally, a religious group must have people who say they belong to it before it can hope to obtain any other kind of consistent service or donation.

For religious groups, there are three primary ways to maintain an identifiable membership base. First, religious groups can simply retain their current members. While this will allow the group to persist for several decades (depending on the ages and life spans of its members), in the long term, a group that only retains its current members without adding new ones is doomed to die.

The second way for religious groups to maintain an identifiable membership base is for current members to effectively pass the religion on to their children. Groups that successfully retain the offspring of current members will survive as long as they have adherents who keep having children. If new generations fail to be committed to the religion or its birthrate decreases, the ability of the group to survive will be diminished.

Consistently recruiting new members from outside the group is the third way for a religion to maintain an identifiable membership base. This is probably the most difficult of the three strategies in that it requires groups to convince individuals to adopt new cultural elements as opposed to simply holding on to their existing ones. While active proselytizing will not occur without a certain level of commitment to the group, rapid growth resulting from conversion is not a direct indicator of religious group solidarity. The successful retention of current members and their children, on the other hand, is a straightforward and important measure of member attachment to their religion and thus is an excellent gauge of religious group solidarity.

Each mode or combination of modes of religious group persistence has different implications for the nature and fate of the religious group. Of course, groups that excel in all three of these areas will be the most robust over time. I do not examine all of these implications here, but it is important to consider the modes of persistence that are most relevant to the case at hand. Typically, Judaism has not actively sought to recruit new members. This being the case, the persistence of American Judaism depends primarily on its ability to foster commitment to the religion among its current membership and on Jewish parents' ability to pass commitment to Judaism on to the next generation. While it is true that children tend to adhere to the faith of their parents (Kluegel 1980; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Finke 2000; Stark and Glock 1968), the rate of adherence is variable and must be explained.

SOCIAL INCENTIVES VERSUS RESTRICTIVE RELIGIOSITY

I have argued that the question of why some religious adherents remain affiliated while others exit the group can be answered by examining the nature and strength of their dependence on the group (Hechter 1987). As mentioned above, people depend on religious groups to gain access to a variety of goods and services. Religions provide explanations about the supernatural and human existence and purpose. Some offer rain, fertility, or a good harvest. A few supply temporal assistance in the form of food, clothing, and money. All provide the sociality benefits that come from being part of a group.

Some researchers assert that the most effective retention strategy for religious groups involves offering compelling secular benefits. Secular benefits are those that can be obtained without resorting to supernatural resources. This view contends that people will continue to participate in religious groups whether or not any substantial otherworldly benefits are offered (Bruce 2002; Buchanan 1979; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Sherkat 1997; Wallis 1991). In fact, to retain members, religious groups must provide support in the form of social ties, educational opportunities, access to mating markets, daycare, and the like (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). From this perspective, groups that can effectively promote social involvement and provide secular benefits to their members should experience higher retention rates. Religions that expect commitment and participation that hinders social or economic advancement or that require members to invest too heavily in the group will alienate their members and eventually lose them.

Historically, many Jewish reformers have accepted the validity of these ideas. In an effort to make Judaism more appealing, numerous Jewish synagogues adopted a strategy of offering greater social incentives for participation. They created youth groups, Sisterhoods, and Brotherhoods; held dances; sponsored sports activities; held funding-raising drives; and generally expanded the goals of synagogues "in order to incorporate the very secular activities" (Silverstein 1994: 207; Levine 1992; Sklare 1971). Jewish country clubs were even established to provide a place for middle- and upper-class Jews to enjoy their high status (Waxman 1999).

In addition to providing social incentives for participation, proponents of reform tried to reduce the costs of Judaism so that it would not impede full participation in American life. They feared that traditional Jewish practices might stir a negative reaction from their Protestant neighbors and combated this by giving up many distinctively Jewish customs (Glazer 1972; Gold 1999). Indeed, a negative view of traditional Jewish ritual and prayer was officially promoted during an 1885 conference of rabbis at which it was concluded that "observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995: 469).

Jews who embraced this stance against traditional Jewish ways could actively participate in Judaism without having it interfere with other aspects of their lives. After all, practicing Jewish rituals and otherwise living the Law of God require much time, effort, and social sacrifice, thereby making it very inconvenient, especially in a modern society. Fasting can be physically uncomfortable. Learning Hebrew takes

many years of study and dedication, and reciting Hebrew prayers can take hours. Furthermore, observing strict dietary laws makes it much harder for Jews to intermingle with other Americans, whether for business or social purposes.

While there can be no doubt these kinds of changes promoted social involvement and increased the social incentives for religious participation, my theory suggests that the end result of such a retention strategy should be lower levels of solidarity in Judaism. This is because to offer greater social incentives, Jewish leaders sacrificed religious beliefs and practices that socially encapsulated members (Proposition 3), removed the aspects of Judaism that provided Jews with inimitable religious capital (Proposition 4), and stopped requiring members to adopt or reject particular outward practices that would help make deviants more apparent (Proposition 7). If I am right, then in making Judaism more socially desirable and less costly, Jewish leaders deemphasized and overturned aspects of Judaism that were important in making it so persistent throughout history.

Consistent with other arguments (Iannaccone 1994), my theoretical approach supports the retention strategy that includes adherence to the traditional doctrines and practices of Judaism. Indeed, from this point of view, the very means applied to make Judaism more socially appealing resulted in a Judaism that is considerably less resistant to religious assimilation. Without traditional observance, there is little to distinguish Jews and their heritage from others. In the absence of these distinctions, American Judaism is weakened and loses its ability to retain adherents (Danzger

1989; DellaPergola 1999; Goldberg 1995; Heilman 1995; Hyman 1999; Liebman 1995a).

DATA AND METHODS

In 1990, Barry Kosmin and his colleagues conducted an important national survey of American Jews (Kosmin et al. 1991). Rather than drawing respondents from synagogue or Jewish community organization membership lists, as was common practice, the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) conducted a national telephone survey using random-digit dialing to construct a national sample of individuals with recent Jewish backgrounds.

During the first stage of the survey, 125,813 American households were contacted using random-digit-dialing. The adult with the most recent birthday was chosen to complete the survey and was asked "What is your religion?" Those who did not answer being Jewish by religion were asked a series of follow-up questions to identify (1) if anyone else in the household was Jewish, (2) if anyone in the household was raised Jewish, or (3) if anyone there had a Jewish parent. If any of these questions was answered in the affirmative, the household was classified as "Jewish". This provided a sample of 5,146 Jewish households, including those households that were no longer Jewish by religion. Of these households, 2,441 completed in depth interviews between May and July of 1990 and constituted the final sample and a response rate of 47% (for more details see Kosmin et al. 1991).

These data are unique in that they allow us to account for people of recent Jewish origins who no longer affiliate with Judaism. This provides us with an

effective way of estimating the retention rate of Judaism in the United States. Indicative of a general trend toward religious assimilation, only 64.8 percent of American Jews who claim to be of recent Jewish origins gave their current religious identification as Jewish. A quarter of Jews (24.3 percent) have become Christian, and one in ten claims to have no religious affiliation (see Table 5.1).

While over one third of American Jews live on the East Coast, most of them in the greater New York City area, another major concentration of Jews is on the West Coast (16 percent), especially in Southern California. Many qualitative judgments have been made about the variable assimilation rates between Jews on the two coasts (Heilman and Cohen 1989; Horowitz 1999; Liebman 1995b). If the retention rates of Judaism on the two coasts are indeed different, this presents us with an unusually apt opportunity to assess the basis of religious retention by doing a regional comparison using quantitative methods on a good sample.

As was expected, the data show that about three-fourths of East Coast Jews (74.2 percent) identify themselves as Jewish by religion, while on the West Coast, a bare majority of individuals of Jewish backgrounds (54.8 percent) have retained their affiliation with Judaism (see Table 5.1). To control for geographic mobility and religious upbringing, I examined the assimilation trends among those who were raised Jewish by religion and who were born and are currently living on the same coast (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Finke 2000). The differences are just as pronounced. Over 80 percent of respondents who were raised Jewish by religion and who were born and are living on the East Coast currently regard themselves as

adherents to Judaism. Of those who were raised as religious Jews on the West Coast, only about 60 percent replied that their current religious preference is Jewish ($P <$ .01). By almost any measure, Jews on the East Coast have been retained by Judaism much more successfully than Jews on the West Coast. Is it possible to distinguish Jewish life in these two areas so as account for the higher retention rates in the East?

One possibility is that the lower rates of affiliation with Judaism in the West reflect some underlying demographic differences. From this point of view, the reason that individuals with Jewish backgrounds on the West Coast are less likely to affiliate with Judaism might relate to the fact that they are at different stages of their lives with different kinds of obligations. It has been shown, for example, that religious preferences can be shaped by wealth and status attainment (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stark and Finke 2000; Stark and Glock 1968). Consequently, differing amounts of education and wealth possessed by Jews on the two coasts might help account for the variable retention rates. However, as is shown in Table 5.2, household income does not distinguish Jews on the two coasts, and respondents in the two regions were equally likely to have completed four years of college.

Another possible reason for the disparity between the two coasts relates to the age and stability of respondents. It is often argued that religious mobility should be more prevalent among younger and unattached individuals because they are more likely to experience shifts in their social ties (Stark and Finke 2000). Accordingly, we might expect the average West Coast Jew to be much younger and less attached than the typical Jew on the East Coast. However, East Coast Jews are no more likely

to be married or single than Jews in the West, and while East Coast Jews are a bit older statistically, the difference between 44 and 46 years old in real terms is negligible and probably has little to do with the disparity between the two coasts (see Table 5.2).

Finally, it has been recognized that parenthood and gender can affect religious choices. Sherkat and Wilson (1995) propose that women will be less likely to change their religious affiliation because they are more socialized into their religious roles than men are. Additionally, parents often remain with a religion for the sake of their children (Hoge and Carroll 1978; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Sherkat and Wilson 1995). Given these assertions, we might expect to find a disproportionate number of Jewish women and of families with children on the East Coast. This is simply not the case (see Table 5.2).

The current demography of East and West Coast Jews seems to give us little insight into why West Coast Jews are less likely to be affiliated with Judaism. Therefore, we must seek an explanation that goes beyond demographic differences. Unfortunately, I know of no longitudinal panel studies of American Jews that would allow a precise study of the prior behaviors and circumstances in their lives that might be producing the current retention rates. However, given that we have some good cross-sectional data, I believe that an approximation of the past characteristics of Jews on the two coasts can be obtained by assuming that the attributes of Jews currently living in those areas are similar to those that might have contributed to the regional disparity.

Of course, because of the presence of so many more Christian and non-religious Jews in the West, it makes little sense to compare the behavior of *all* people with Jewish backgrounds in the two regions. Obviously, those who no longer affiliate with the Jewish religion would be much less likely to adhere to any uniquely Jewish religious practices. Thus, including them in the comparison would result in an obvious bias in favor of the inimitable religious capital and social encapsulation explanation. If I limit the analysis to people who still claim to be affiliated with the Jewish religion, however, that bias is removed. If anything, this approach should predispose the results *against* showing any differences in the religious activities of Jews on the two coasts.

In short, I am assuming that Jews on the two coasts *who still affiliate with Judaism* will to some extent exhibit the differences that resulted in the greater or lesser resistance to religious assimilation in those regions. While the scope of this analysis is limited, I believe that it is a valuable start and can begin to provide us with an understanding of what makes some Jews more resistant than others to assimilation pressures.

On the basis of the theories presented, several hypotheses can be deduced concerning the retention rates of American Jews in the two regions. If making Judaism more socially appealing results in higher retention rates, then the following two hypotheses should hold true:

Hypothesis 1: Religious Jews on the West Coast will be less likely than those on the East Coast to be receiving *secular Jewish benefits.*

Hypothesis 2: Religious Jews on the West Coast will be less likely than those on the East Coast to be *socially involved with Jewish culture.*

If inimitable religious capital investment, requiring detectable outward practices, and social encapsulation are primarily responsible for the variable retention rates, however, then support should be found for the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Religious Jews on the West Coast will be less likely than those on the East Coast to be participating in behaviors that are *socially encapsulating.*

Hypothesis 4: Religious Jews on the West Coast will be less likely than those on the East Coast to be investing in inimitable Jewish capital.

Hypothesis 5: Religious Jews on the West Coast will be less likely than those on the East Coast to be adopting or rejecting particular outward practices as required by Jewish Law.

MEASURES

Many important *secular benefits* are available to American Jews. The data allow me to consider three of them. Friendship is perhaps the most important. Respondents were asked how many of their "closest" friends are Jewish. To account for any subtle variations between the two coasts, I separately examine the proportion of respondents who claim to have all, mostly, or some Jewish friends. This gives us a sense of the level of day-to-day interaction an individual has with other Jews. To capture the psychological benefit of being Jewish, I identify respondents who think being Jewish is "very" or "somewhat" important. A feeling of pride in one's ethnic

or religious heritage can be quite rewarding. Finally, a good education can serve to improve the economic and social circumstances of an individual. Thus, the last variable I consider as an indicator of Jewish social benefits is access to Jewish schools. Specifically, respondents were asked whether or not they have received "any" Jewish education.

American Jewish culture also offers many interesting opportunities for *social involvement*. To measure this concept, I use two separate variables. Respondents were asked whether or not their household subscribes to Jewish periodicals or belongs to Jewish organizations. Both of these variables represent a nontraditional way for Jews to be engaged with Jewish culture and are thus used to test hypothesis 2.

The data provide four useful indicators of *social encapsulation,* which it turns out are also measures of *outward practice*. Perhaps the most compelling indicators relate to keeping kosher and refraining from handling money on the Sabbath. Jews who keep kosher typically cannot eat with non-Jews. This prevents them from visiting certain homes for dinner and going to certain restaurants. It potentially restricts them from participating in a whole range of daily activities with non-Jews. Likewise, Jews who refrain from handling money on the Sabbath exclude themselves from some aspects of American culture, such as weekend shopping. More important, however, such individuals are unable to accept certain types of employment. In this way, adhering to this principle restricts their economic opportunities as well.

Likewise, Jews who shop on the Sabbath or fail to keep kosher can be identified as breaking traditional Jewish Law.

Respondents who live in Jewish neighborhoods are also more socially encapsulated. This is a function of their being less likely to have non-Jewish neighbors with whom to interact. Finally, social encapsulation can be measured in terms of the level of influence Jews allow the predominant culture to have in their lives. Respondents were asked the frequency with which a Christmas tree is put up in their homes. Those who replied that they "never" put up a Christmas tree are demonstrating a commitment to maintaining a separation from the general holiday culture in the United States. This is an indication that they are unwilling to celebrate in the same way as their non-Jewish friends. Additionally, putting a Christmas tree up is something that will be noticed by others.

To test the fourth hypothesis, I look at participation in four *unique traditional Jewish rituals*. Passover, for example, commemorates the time when God delivered the Jews from Egyptian bondage. Jews who attend Seder eat special foods and perform special rituals to remind them of God's blessings. Households that light Hanukkah candles remember the temple flask filled with enough oil to light the menorah for one day yet burned for eight days. Jews who fast on Yom Kippur seek to atone for their sins of the past year and appeal to God for forgiveness. Finally, by attending Purim, Jews remember the story of Esther and how she saved the Persian Jews from extermination. To the best of my knowledge, these traditions represent inimitable religious capital in that no other religions practice them.

RESULTS

Table 5.3 examines Jewish social involvement and the secular benefits offered to Jews. Jews on the West Coast are as likely as those on the East Coast to limit their friendships to Jews. Jews in the West and the East place equal emphasis on the importance of being Jewish, and Jews on both sides of the country are also equally likely to have received a Jewish education. Thus, Jews on the East and West Coasts are not distinguished by the secular benefits they receive.

Similarly, social involvement does not differentiate Jews on the two coasts. East Coast Jews are just as likely as West Coast Jews to belong to a Jewish organization, and circulation of Jewish periodicals is proportionately as high in the West as in the East. On all available indicators, social involvement and secular benefits clearly do not distinguish religious Jews on the two coasts. Thus, there is no evidence for hypotheses 1 and 2.

Table 5.4 examines measures of the *social encapsulation, religious capital investment, and outward practice* of religious Jews. All of the social encapsulation and outward practice measures significantly distinguish the two coasts. Jews in the East are substantially more likely (57.8 percent) to observe some degree of kosher than are western Jews (28.8 percent). Likewise, while most Jews continue to handle and spend money on the Sabbath, a significantly higher proportion of Jews in the East refrains. The majority (54.9 percent) of eastern Jews live in a "Jewish neighborhood," while out West, slightly fewer than a third (30.3 percent) live in such

a neighborhood. Finally, East Coast Jews are more likely (83.2 percent) than West Coast Jews (71.1 percent) to never put up a Christmas tree.

A very similar contrast exists in terms of investing in inimitable religious capital. 67.2 percent of Jews in the East attend Seder all the time, while in the West, only 55.1 percent do so. Jews on both coasts light candles on Hanukkah, but a significantly smaller percentage do so in the West. Only 46.3 percent of West Coast Jews fast on Yom Kippur, while 64.4 percent of Jews in the East observe the fast. Finally, on the East Coast, a greater proportion of Jews (30.1 percent) attend the Purim celebration than in the West (21.9 percent). Thus, the data in Table 5.4 strongly support hypotheses 3, 4 and 5.

DISCUSSION

As is evident from the data, efforts to downplay traditional Judaism in the Unites States have been largely successful. The focus of much contemporary American Jewish life is social rather than religious (Gold and Phillips 1996). Glazer (1972: 126) notes that by the mid-1900s in many synagogues, "religious services often seemed the least vital of the many 'services' supplied". For some Jews, synagogues became "the chief way in which Jews came in touch with Jewish social circles" (Glazer 1972: 156). Silverstein (1994: 207) describes that "commitment to temple life became an ethnic loyalty, often an expression of Jewish identity rather than a statement of faith or of religious practice."

Among Jews in the United States, there is also a clear movement away from Judaism. More and more Jews are becoming Christians or are leaving organized

religion altogether. This deterioration is especially profound on the West Coast, where the form of devotion demonstrated among religious Jews is significantly less traditional than what is found in the East. Therefore, the data provide support for the idea that promoting commitment to traditional Jewish ritual and practice is a more sound retention strategy than endorsing a less socially costly and more socially open form of the faith.

By reforming its traditional doctrines and practices, Jewish leaders had hoped to make Judaism more socially appealing, thus ensuring its persistence. Indeed, their expectation that a less traditional Judaism would produce a more persistent one was entirely reasonable. As a result of their reforms, the tension between Judaism and American society has been eased. Social outings with non-Jews are much simpler without dietary restrictions. Jews who reject traditional Judaism can freely do business on the Sabbath and thus make greater profits without feeling as though they are going against their religion. In addition to this, being freed from the obligation of regularly performing Jewish rituals and prayers, as traditionally expected, Jews do not have to feel as inconvenienced by their faith. If social appeal is the key to high retention rates, then it is difficult to imagine how a less traditional Judaism could have resulted in anything but a more successful Jewish religion.

Unfortunately, in their efforts to strengthen Judaism, Jewish leaders sacrificed its ability to detect weakening members and sustain a high degree of social encapsulation and in this way unintentionally undermined its ability to persist. Traditional dietary laws had "precluded fraternization and intermingling," and

"observing the Sabbath on Saturdays separated Jews from those who observed it on Sundays" (Heilman and Cohen 1989: 10). As Jews continue to freely associate with non-Jews, they are more susceptible to intermarriage and other interactions that tend to lead to even greater reductions in commitment to religious tradition. This may eventually result in substantially more religious switching (Waxman 2001).

Perhaps more important, the result of denying traditional Judaism might be a religion that is not capable of retaining future generations (Heilman and Cohen 1989). If social encapsulation is a primary mechanism by which assimilation is averted, then less traditional western households are also more likely to be having children who are not encapsulated. If Jewish children feel free to engage in any interaction they deem worthwhile, their connections to Judaism will be weakened as they come to have more non-Jewish friends and participate in fewer exclusively Jewish activities. In the absence of specific rules about what is considered to be acceptable outward practice, it is much more difficult for leaders and parents to see when a child's commitment is waning.

Furthermore, by eliminating the need for participation in traditional rituals and customs, important mechanisms for the transfer of religious capital were removed. Learning about and participating in rituals that are "distinctively Jewish" is vital for Jewish children because doing so "signifies commitment with content" (Heilman 1995: 120). Scholars of Judaism have emphasized that "the most central aspects of religious practice occur in the home" and that home practice has "facilitated the transmission of Judaism" to the next generation (Danzger 1989: 28;

Wistrich 1995). If, as the inimitable religious capital approach suggests, taking time to help children learn and adhere to unique religious customs is necessary for retaining them, the lower rates of ritual observance in the West should continue to produce Jews who are less attached to Judaism.

Children tend to replicate the ritual practices of their parents, and as parents have diminished their investment in traditional ways, so too have their children. Heilman (1995: 120) claims that this is "perhaps the single most consistent fact about Jewish generational reality". He also notes that what often occurs among contemporary Jews is that parents who are not very actively Jewish make minimal efforts to introduce their children to traditional Judaism, expecting their children to somehow maintain some piece of Jewish identity, only to find that their children drift even farther away from their heritage. Meanwhile, the children of Jews who observe the traditional practices of Judaism tend to be even more attached and observant than their parents are (Heilman and Cohen 1989).

Inimitable religious capital, because it is distinctive and attached to a specific culture, has the capacity to stick through the generations. However, any attachment Jewish parents have to their friends and any social benefits they receive from their participation in Judaism are often not transferable to their children. Accordingly, Jews who choose to be involved with Judaism only socially and affiliate with the faith to obtain social rewards will have a difficult time convincing their children to remain committed for the same reasons.

On the other hand, parents who openly communicate religious convictions and help their children invest in religious capital by observing religious teachings and consistently practicing traditional rituals and customs in the home should be more likely to have children with strong and enduring confidence in the religious culture. This essentially makes them more dependent on the group and increases their need to remain with it.

By trying to minimize the scope of the sacred to fit it within the frame of the secular, Jewish reformers were essentially eliminating the distinctions between Jews and other Americans. Furthermore, their approach to Judaism eradicated mechanisms for passing the religion to the next generation without providing effective new ones. If my analysis is correct, the result is that Judaism has been weakened. If this is true, then Jewish leaders who promoted changing Judaism in ways that minimized the importance of traditional rituals and practices were mistaken to think that their way was a more effective retention strategy.

However, there is at least one other possible explanation for the regional patterns shown above that I have not yet considered. In their groundbreaking work on crosscutting social circles, Blau and Schwarz (1984) argued that social structure, particularly in the form of the population distribution, can have a significant impact on social change and group solidarity. Accordingly, it may be that East Coast Jews are retained by Judaism in greater numbers simply because the population density of Jews on that coast is greater and thus provides them with more opportunities to interact with each other. Additionally, eastern Jews have greater access to

synagogues, Jewish shops, and other resources that make being faithful easier. Indeed, this train of thought is supported by the fact that West Coast Jews are much less likely than East Coast Jews to live in a Jewish neighborhood (see Table 5.4).

While I cannot entirely exclude this possibility, it is just as likely that the settlement patterns of Jews are the effect of religious choice. Many Jews believe that to properly live the law of God, they must walk to synagogue, for example. Jews with this kind of commitment are essentially required to live in a Jewish neighborhood because they want to observe Shabbat, keep kosher, and otherwise live according to God's will. In other words, it may be that because they are more attached to the traditional doctrines and practices of Judaism, East Coast Jews elect to increase their own social encapsulation, which ultimately strengthens Judaism in that region. This further supports my argument.

This self-selection process is acknowledged by Blau and Schwarz. They maintain that individuals sometimes look to consolidate their social ties by moving to neighborhoods filled with like individuals. In contrast, they also contend that social mobility "is often stimulated by an interest in escaping one's old surroundings" and "often entails deliberate efforts to change one's old group" (Blau and Schwarz 1984: 101). If this is true, it may be that the very fact that some Jews stay away from Jewish neighborhoods is a reaffirmation of their weaker ties to Judaism and the Jewish tradition.

Conclusion

Although there can be no doubt that many of the changes made to Jewish theology and practice increased the social appeal of participating in Jewish religious life, I have argued that in the absence of mechanisms for social encapsulation and intergenerational religious transfer, such changes might not be able to sustain Judaism effectively in the long term.

I have provided a preliminary analysis of the impact of two distinctive retention strategies on religious assimilation among American Jews on the East and West Coasts. I hope that, in the future, longitudinal studies will be conducted that more precisely examine the extent of traditional observance in Jewish homes and the impact this has on the religious socialization of Jewish children and, ultimately, their willingness to remain faithful to Judaism.

Currently, the vast majority of Jews in the Unites States, particularly Jews on the West Coast, have, at least to some degree, accepted a less traditional version of Jewish theology and practice. Indeed, many contemporary Jews have entirely rejected traditional Judaism (Stark and Finke 2000; Waxman 2001). Some scholars involved with Jewish studies believe that the traditional Jewish religion is the most persistent form of Jewishness. DellaPergola (1999: 67), for example, writes that "identification according to religion, involving exclusively Jewish individual practice . . . . appears to be a stronger mode of Jewishness than ethnicity." Hyman (1999: 120) concluded from her study of Western Diaspora societies that "an ethnic Jewish

identity divorced from religious concerns has shown no basis for survival beyond the immigrant generation in any of the Western Diaspora societies."

If this is true, then the current trends of decreasing levels of traditional religious observance among Jews with the accompanying decline in affiliation with Judaism might have even stronger implications than those that I have discussed here. However, the real test for Judaism will come in the future. I suspect that the retention rates of Judaism in the United States will continue to fall, particularly in the West, unless Jewish leaders find ways of returning distinctiveness to Jewish communities. Requiring rules about what outward practices should be adopted or rejected and promoting investment in inimitable Jewish religious capital might also go a long way in reestablishing high levels of solidarity in Judaism. Interestingly, there has been a recent trend among Reform synagogues to move away from Protestant influences and embrace more traditional ways. Likewise, Conservative synagogues are turning more toward orthodoxy. If these trends continue and are disseminated to the general Jewish population, I expect that Judaism will experience revitalization. Ultimately, there is no reason why Judaism should not last another 5,000 years.

Table 5.1: Current Religious Preference of American Jews

	East Coast*	West Coast†	National
Jewish	74.2%	54.8%	64.8%
Christian	17.2%	26.5%	24.3%
No Religion	8.6%	18.7%	10.9%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n =	(803)	(343)	(2,214)

Significant at the .01 level.
*Persons residing in the Middle Atlantic region (NY, NJ, PA).
†Persons residing in the Pacific region (CA, OR, WA).

Table 5.2: Demographic Characteristics of Jews

	East Coast	West Coast
Married	57.9%	60.0%
Single	22.7%	21.8%
Male	47.1%	46.9%
4 years of college or more	55.0%	51.1%
Average household income	$61,000	$57,000
Average age	46 years	44 years*
Have children	69.3%	70.6%
n =	(885)	(386)

*Significant at the .05 level.

Table 5.3: Social Involvement and Secular Benefits

	East Coast	West Coast
Has *only* Jewish friends	17.2%	16.0%
Has *mostly* Jewish friends	35.9%	30.9%
Has *some* Jewish friends	34.7%	35.1%
Thinks it is "important" to be Jewish	87.4%	89.4%
Ever received any Jewish education	78.3%	73.4%
Belongs to a Jewish organization	69.3%	70.6%
Subscribes to Jewish periodicals	30.1%	30.3%
n =	(596)	(188)

*Significant at the .05 level.

Table 5.4: Outward Practice, Social Encapsulation and Religious Capital Investment

	East Coast	West Coast
Observes some degree of kosher	57.8%	28.8%**
Refrains from handling money on Shabbat	15.5%	9.6%*
Lives in a "Jewish neighborhood"	54.9%	30.3%**
Never puts up a Christmas tree	83.2%	71.1%**
Attends Seder "all the time"	67.2%	55.1%*
Lights candles "all the time" on Hanukkah	66.6%	54.8%*
Fasts on Yom Kippur	64.4%	46.3%**
Attends Purim celebration	30.1%	21.9%*
n =	(596)	(188)

*Significant at the .05 level.
**Significant at the .01 level.

Chapter 6: Rethinking Religion and Social Solidarity

Neglecting the importance of confidence and belief in driving human action is a serious mistake that has been continually made. I have proposed a theoretical synthesis that strengthens the general project of understanding religious sacrifice by moving faith, doctrinal content, and religious interaction more to the center of the debate. I have provided evidence that certain religious explanations, when believed to be real and plausible, motivate members of religious groups to act on behalf of the group or according to the dictates of the group. I have argued that religious groups that have members who are confident that their church has an exclusive right to utilize certain supernatural resources and who believe they must comply with group rules to obtain the otherworldly rewards it offers will be able to maintain solidarity even in the absence of formal controls.

Consequently, religious group solidarity is contingent not only upon material dependence and formal controls, as Hechter (1987) suggests, but it can also be achieved and strengthened as religions instill confidence in the religious explanations they offer about the nature of God and the attainment of supernatural resources. Member dependence can further be enhanced if the group doctrinally requires the acquisition of inimitable religious capital (Finke 2004) and instills confidence in beliefs and behaviors that socially encapsulate their members (Stark 2001). In essence, I have argued that as group members come to believe in solidarity-producing explanations offered by the group, their individual welfare comes to be equated with positive group outcomes.

Though it is easy to want people to be sure about unempirical realities, actually achieving widespread confidence in them is not. I have contended that one way religious groups can instill confidence is by encouraging their members to publicly express confidence. By fostering such public interactions among adherents, religious groups provide opportunities for members to observe each other's expressions of confidence. Religious groups that effectively promote public expressions of confidence that are more reliable and trustworthy will be most likely to maximize confidence.

Likewise, I have asserted that religious groups can help members to realize confidence-producing experiences by providing explanations about what their emotions mean and how they should impact behavior. Religious groups that do not provide a religious framework within which to interpret emotional experiences will be less likely to have members who identify them as evidence of supernatural resources. Another potential benefit of encouraging group members to express confidence to one another is that they will raise awareness about the different ways in which living the religion has real consequences. As members realize the possibility of various manifestations of the efficacy of religious explanations, they will be more likely to see such manifestations in their own lives and, in turn, will have increased faith in the existence of supernatural resources and the ability of their religious group to utilize them.

EXTREME SACRIFICE

While I have provided evidence that the theory outlined above can be useful in helping us understand common manifestations of religious group solidarity, I would like to briefly consider whether or not it can offer insights into groups that obtain very extreme sacrifices from their members. Unfortunately, very little research has sought to address the influence of confidence-building culture on suicide bombing. In fact, while most students of terrorism take note of the intense confidence of those willing to kill themselves for a cause, there seems to be a lack of explanations about why they are so sure and where that confidence comes from (Pape 2005; Reuter 2004; Juergensmeyer 2003; Stern 2003). Do these organizations exhibit any of the solidarity-producing characteristics of religious cultures?

Many who have studied terrorist organizations that use suicide bombing note the use of supernatural resources as motivation. Juergensmeyer reports that terrorist groups Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah, among others, often use images of a "cosmic war" to inspire their adherents. In essence the violence of the here and now is viewed as a reflection of a much larger war between good and evil that must be fought and won for salvation to be achieved (2003). When this is believed, potential bombers can position the importance of the act on a much higher and more important plane than they could without reference to supernatural implications. More directly, leaders of Hamas tell potential bombers they will receive 72 virgins and 75 wives in heaven for their service (Juergensmeyer 2003), and martyrs for Hezbollah and Al Qaeda earn a one-way ticket to paradise (Reuter 2004).

The extent to which access to supernatural resources increases the probability that suicide bombing will take place remains undetermined. It is a little known fact that the most aggressive suicide bombing group is rooted in a secular, Marxist ideology. Pape, who has collected the most complete dataset of suicide bombers currently in existence, refers to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as "the world's leading suicide terrorist organization", having conducted 76 suicide missions involving 143 men and women from 1987 to 2001 (2005:139). While at first glance there is no apparent religious dimension to their actions, scholars have noted the similarity between self-martyrdom and teachings of heroic death in the Tamil religion of Saivism. People have even been known to build shrines to martyrs and make the same offerings there as they do in their temples (Chandrakanthan 2000). Pape has further suggested that religious conflict and fear of religious domination is a crucial factor motivating the Tigers to sacrifice themselves. This suggests that religion may play more of a role with this group than it seems to on the surface (Pape 2005). Even so, while supernatural resources seem to play a role in these groups, much work remains to be done before we will fully understand its role.

Most suicide organizations, including Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, and the Tamil Tigers, place great emphasis on suicide-promoting interactions. For example, the Tamil Tigers glorify suicide attackers immediately after their death by holding public processions "with pomp and pageantry" in their honor (Pape 2005:144). They celebrate a holiday on July 5th (Heroes' Day) in honor of the first Black Tiger attack. They even build monuments to suicide-martyrs in prominent public spaces, all to

emphasize to observers that the act of suicide bombing is a good thing worthy of praise. Likewise, Hamas holds elaborate funeral celebrations for men who gave up their lives for the cause, praising their actions of suicide-martyrdom (Juergensmeyer 2003). Within all such groups, suicide bombing itself is a most profound expression of confidence. Can there be any doubt that the person willing to die for the cause believed it was a worthy one?

The principles of encapsulation and exclusivity are also evident in terrorist organizations. Terrorist groups like the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey and the Tamil Tigers are physically closed and isolated. In both groups, members swear exclusive allegiance to their leaders, who are accorded quasi-divine status. In the case of the Tigers, recruits have to follow a strict moral code. They are not allowed to marry or have sex, for example. Also, they are taught that shame and dishonor will follow anyone who is captured alive (Reuter 2004). Those groups focused on the cosmic war mentioned above are also inherently exclusive. There is only one righteous side in the war and all opponents are evil and must be defeated. This sentiment inherently presents the group's use of suicide terrorism as a way to secure a victory for the one true point of view in the struggle (Juergensmeyer 2003).

Interestingly, Reuter notes that the more religiously-based terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda work within their communities rather than in physical isolation like the PKK and the Tamil Tigers. This may be a reflection of a religious advantage. Groups most focused on religious outcomes can more easily substitute confidence in exclusivity for physical isolation. Members of religiously-

based groups that are out in the community and faced with opposing viewpoints are perhaps better equipped to resist opposing ideas than those whose declared ends are more political or secular in nature and thus more open to empirical contradiction. The possibility that once confidence is instilled, members of these organizations will follow through, even in the absence of formal controls and physical isolation, needs to be explored further (Hechter 1987).

It has been well established that suicide terrorism is almost always a group phenomenon (Juergensmeyer 2003; Pape 2005). In other words, suicide bombers are almost never acting alone. Killing one's self for the group is perhaps the most extreme sacrifice possible. Consequently, I would expect future studies to reveal terrorists willing to die for their causes to be extremely confident in solidarity-producing content and very involved in cultures that effectively promote confidence in the necessity of self-martyrdom. Whether the goals of a terrorist organization are religious or political, I suspect the foundational principles motivating suicide within the group to be akin to those outlined above for religious groups. A very brief look at the world of terrorism seems to reveal the presence of several of these elements; however, little can be concluded from this brief analysis.

My intent here has not been to give a comprehensive account of what causes suicide terrorism. Indeed, it has been suggested that many other factors might impact the likelihood that groups will use suicide bombing (Iannaccone 2006; Pape 2005; Reuter 2004; Juergensmeyer 2003; Stern 2003; Paper 2001). What I have tried to do is discuss how a few of the mechanisms I have presented might help us to better

account for it. It seems that terrorist groups seeking to motivate suicide-martyrdom almost always take advantage of the supernatural resources religion has to offer. Many also use the same methods as religion to instill confidence in them. Obviously, it would be difficult to argue that worldly benefits are the major source of motivation for someone who is dead. Still, what role supernatural and secular resources play in motivating suicide-martyrdom remains unclear, and future research should address this question in more depth.

Finally, while most terrorist organizations are directly connected to religion, even those that claim not to be exhibit characteristics that are religious-like. It follows that perhaps the most important question to ask is what endogenous factors distinguish organizations that utilize suicide bombing from other high-commitment groups that do not? I believe the answer is simple—the content of the group's culture. In this case, cultural content does not refer simply to religious texts used by the group. Indeed, most religious texts include writings that could be used to mobilize violence in some form, and some groups that rely on identical texts differ on their use of a suicide strategy. If the texts are a constant, they cannot explain the variation between the groups.

I believe organizational leaders are the endogenous factor that can explain the differential use of suicide bombing. Group leaders are perhaps the most influential source of cultural content. If they promote suicide terrorism as a viable method of showing devotion and being saved, and create effective confidence-building interactions around that principle, then group members will come to view it as a

noble and worthy act. In all cases where suicide bombing is utilized by groups, the leaders of the groups are organizing and promoting it. The obvious question becomes why? There are potentially hundreds of answers that range from macro-level, structural circumstance of society, down to the psychology of particular religious leaders. Unfortunately, resolving this question is beyond the scope of the present study.

THE RELIGIOUS ADVANTAGE

While this study has primarily focused on exploring religious group solidarity, a focus on confidence and content could be useful in other contexts as well. Obviously not everyone believes in religion. However, everyone does believe in something. Confidence, in fact, is the foundation of all sorts of purposive actions. We come to have confidence that our actions will produce certain outcomes through our own experience and by observing the experiences and expressions of others. Our belief that certain actions yield predictable results is what compels us to act. While we may identify any number of demographic or institutional variables that will significantly impact behavior, I contend that confidence is a fundamental mechanism driving all purposive action.

A person entering a dark room flips a light switch because she has confidence the act will result in the lights coming on. The calculating criminal steals a car because he believes stealing it may be profitable or exciting. A sociology professor tirelessly works to refine a paper only if she believes there is a chance it could be published or recognized. None of these behaviors is contingent upon the individual

actor *knowing* what the outcome will be. Rather they are performed because of an outcome the actor is *confident* will result. The amount of confidence will vary from case to case and *actual* outcomes only influence purposive action insofar as they impact beliefs about and confidence in future outcomes. If flipping the light switch consistently failed to provide light, one's confidence in the likelihood of that result would decrease.

Ultimately, it is what we believe and how strongly we believe it that determines many of the things we willfully do. If this is true, then some essential questions for social scientists hoping to understand *any* behavior should include the following: What do people believe about the causes and effects of their actions? Why do they believe this way? Why are some people more confident about what they believe than others, and how does this variation relate to the likelihood that specific behaviors will occur?

As noted in the discussion of terrorism above, I believe many of the mechanisms I have outlined that drive religious group solidarity and instill religious confidence might also be applied to the secular realm of behavior. But, is it possible for secular organizations to achieve the same level of commitment from their members as religions do? This is a difficult question to answer. It seems likely that if the mechanisms I have identified as producing solidarity work in a religious context, then many of the same mechanisms should be able to produce substantial solidarity within secular groups.

There is nothing to stop secular groups from claiming to have exclusive truth or from promoting ritual-like interactions. Secular organizations can just as easily encourage trustworthy expressions of confidence, impose rules that are socially encapsulating, and require members to adopt visible outward practices to keep the cost of control down. Indeed, the Soviet Union did just this throughout their extensive 80-year attempt to "kill God" by subverting religious belief and replacing it with a secular ideology (Froese 2008).

From Durkheim's perspective, the Soviets did everything right. They created elaborate rituals and promoted a common belief system. New social institutions were developed around "sacred" communist principles, and a form of salvation was offered. They even had scriptural texts in the writings of Marx and Engels. However, as we all know, the great Secularization Experiment largely failed. What went wrong? Froese provides some insights into this question with the following comparison between the United States and the Soviet Union:

> "The sacredness of national identity and civil society in the United States fully depends on a shared religious sensibility. Without God or a religious underpinning, American symbols lose their sacredness. This being the case, what sanctified Soviet symbols, rituals and identities in the absence of God?" (2008: 252)

In other words, one of the ways the Soviets went wrong was in their cultural content. In the absence of a supernatural realm, Communist leaders could not appeal to some higher power or purpose to justify their actions, nor could they defer to it

when things went wrong or promises were not kept. In essence, they had no way to deal with doubt and failure beyond their personal claims that things would work out in the end. Unfortunately (for them), they were only human and without God were limited to offering this-worldly incentives, which were ultimately open to empirical verification. Faith was only needed until it was clear the system was not working, and without otherworldly entities to turn to, the only ones to blame for inefficiencies were state leaders. Without God, the guarantees Communist culture was making became simply too good to be true, especially if human beings had to somehow make them come to pass (Froese 2001).

Some evidence does suggest that the Soviets were successful at diminishing religious confidence and instilling confidence in certain Soviet principles. However, this new confidence was attached to atheist symbols and other cultural elements that did not have sufficient power to sustain long-lasting commitment (Stark 2001). It is perhaps ironic that whenever elements of the secular world seek to establish some sort of ultimate, exclusive truth, they begin to resemble religion. This seems to be true of the PKK and Tamil Tigers as well. Perhaps this is a testament to the success religion has found when it comes to certainty production. Had the Soviet Union figured out how to instill effective solidarity-producing content, perhaps there would be greater demand for the Soviet creed today.

Despite the fact that secular ideologies are sometimes promoted and sustained in many of the same ways as religious ones, the example of the Soviet Union illustrates that religion has a distinct advantage—it can provide an infinite

incentive structure, which in turn, allows it to better maximize member contributions (Stark 2001). Purely human organizations have a much harder time convincing members to sacrifice because they cannot offer them as much to sacrifice for. Still, if we can understand the origins and impact of confidence in various cultural contexts, including secular ones, we can better comprehend and account for the actions of not only religious believers, but of any who are motivated by belief.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCERNS

I believe the approach presented here makes a number of significant contributions to the social scientific study of religion. First and foremost, it establishes confidence in religious explanations as a culturally developed resource that groups can utilize to achieve their ends. By specifying the micro-mechanisms that produce variable confidence and acceptance of religious explanations across individuals, I provide a theoretical framework for understanding the conditions under which cultural forces will be more or less salient in people's lives. Thus, my argument explains why some religious cultures may be more effective at promoting and sustaining themselves across generations. In this way, I have retained the prediction of cultural continuity in cases where traditional forces are stronger, or in other words, when they promote expressions of confidence that are more reliable and trustworthy, but I have also argued that individuals should be more likely to opt out of established ways when culture is weakly presented and upheld—or when expressions of confidence are absent or less reliable.

This model further argues that religious culture derives its ability to shape outcomes largely from its content. In this way, my framework goes beyond cultural theories that emphasize how common values and beliefs promote solidarity (Durkheim [1912] 2001). There is nothing inherent about believing in similar ideas that will insure group cohesiveness. Indeed, it is just as likely that common values and beliefs could reduce solidarity. It all depends on whether the content is solidarity-producing. Ultimately, the problem of understanding religious group solidarity has to do with individual motivation and a group's effectiveness at shaping those motivations in a way that secures group ends. I have addressed the role of the religious group in terms of its ability to supply the right kind of belief content and effectively convince members that their content is valid.

If it is true that the content of religious explanations and the degree of confidence members have in them are important factors in determining group solidarity, then it follows that adjusting religious explanations and practices will result in changing solidarity as it alters member confidence as well as the nature and worth of the incentives being offered. Previously costly behavior might become very beneficial and vice versa. This is demonstrated in the case of American Judaism. Essentially, each group doctrinally determines the individual's path to receiving the maximum benefits the group has to offer. Leaders of religions have a crucial role to play in determining the solidarity of their respective groups as they establish which doctrines to preach and emphasize and which reforms to make (Abel 2005).

I have also theoretically and empirically dealt with the issue of religious confidence more directly than has been done in the past. In fact, I have yet to see an empirical study, besides my own, where religious *confidence* is taken as a dependent variable. Also, typically only "yes" and "no" belief is used as an independent variable. Consequently, much empirical work remains to be done before we will have a full understanding of religious confidence.

By focusing on the origins and impact of religious confidence, I have also addressed several concerns about uncertainty in religion (Hechter 1997; Montgomery 1996; Iannaccone 1995; Montgomery 1992). To the extent that religious groups can shape member confidence, they can influence the perceived risk associated with living according to religious principles. By instilling confidence in solidarity-producing content, groups can essentially reduce and perhaps even remove the risk members associate with costly religious choices. As long as religious adherents have doubts, the likelihood they will sacrifice for their group should be diminished.

The principles I have outlined can also be used to reevaluate explanations related to changing religious preferences and demand. Supply-side models of religion largely ignore many important cultural factors that can shape religious commitment despite the nature of the religious economy (Stark and Finke 2000). Considering the origin of the power of religious culture allows us to account for religious change that the current religious economies model does not explain. Another important point derived from my argument is that despite what external forces there are that promote secularization, religious monopolization, or deny the

efficacy of religious thought (Bruce 2002), given the right endogenous conditions (conditions that religious leaders often establish), group beliefs and practices can be maintained as long as effective religious culture continues to be produced. It does not necessarily matter what the religious market looks like or if there is more or less religious competition—solidarity can be nurtured and a high level of religious commitment can be achieved.

As I noted earlier, it might be best to think of religion as a set of convictions that cause people to ignore, overcome or reject their personal preferences (or wants and desires) in a way that is consistent with the doctrines and actions that they believe to be true or from a higher power (Smith 2003). Thus, a person may not actually prefer it at all, but rather believe it must be done *despite* their preferences. Still, it is unclear how preferences and beliefs are related. If a preference or belief changes, is there some sort of immediate effect that restores consistency between them? I suspect that beliefs and preferences are sometimes in conflict and remain that way for substantial periods of time. Notwithstanding, cognitive dissonance theory might be effectively used to better understand this relationship (Cooper 2007; Montgomery 1996; Montgomery 1992; Festinger 1957). As I suggested earlier, it may be that higher confidence in certain beliefs produces a greater magnitude of dissonance. If this is true, it might help cognitive dissonance theorists better understand when to predict behavioral change rather than attitudinal change (Cooper 2007).

Another possibility I have suggested is that religiously motivated action is not necessarily just about "liking" or "disliking", or even "wanting" and "not wanting." Surely, some people do develop primary desires to adhere to strict religious principles. But it seems more plausible that individuals highly committed to certain moral behaviors do not find the strict way to be the easiest way. So, why conform? Why commit? Why sacrifice? I think the answer lies in their faith.

It may also be that what religion accomplishes is a reordering of preferences. At some point individuals might make certain choices because they believe they must. Eventually, however, as their faith grows, their desire to live the way they believe is right becomes preferred. If those convictions are properly nurtured and serve to attach members more strongly to their group, solidarity is enhanced. If the faithful are left to themselves and confidence wanes, or if they come to have confidence in individualistic principles, solidarity is diminished.

By acknowledging that there are cultural factors that produce differential religious confidence, I do not mean to suggest that individuals are not rational. Humans are active participants in their own socialization, which partially explains "why people are never mere 'cultural dopes,' why socialization is never entirely effective or complete, and why humanly intended social change can and does happen" (Smith 2003: 28). In essence, people are rational, but they are rational given their own set of assumptions about the world, which are shaped by their religious and secular culture. By focusing on the content of personal belief, we can stipulate how certain assumptions should impact individual action. The study of confidence, in

contrast, helps us understand the conditions under which cultural assumptions will be more or less significant in people's lives.

Outside of examining compliance with group norms, no effective way of measuring the extent to which religious culture is internalized has been established. This presents researchers with little chance to disentangle the effects of internalization from those of external sanctions, habits, and preferences. Considering my perspective, confidence in specific beliefs might be identified as an indicator of the extent of internalization. Given proper measures, this might allow us to empirically determine the independent effects of internalized socialization on religious behavior. Consequently, we should be able to explore more directly how socialization can both determine a person's ends and limit his choices of means.

Finally, whereas it seems social scientists unanimously agree that ritual breeds confidence, I have rarely seen any provide compelling empirical evidence of this (Collins 2004; Stark and Finke 2000; Collins 1997; Geertz 1973; Homans 1941; Davis 1949; Durkheim [1912] 2001). Thus, I have tried to encase ritual in the broader context of religious interaction and empirically demonstrate how such interactions can play a key role in the production of religious confidence. Furthermore, I have tried to draw upon some of the literature in other disciplines to better establish the neurological and psychological basis of the interaction between ritual and religious belief (Cooper 2007; Newberg et al. 2001). Of course, I have only scratched the surface of what is available and hope others will seek to do so more completely.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Though I believe much has been accomplished in the present study, there is still much to be done. Methodologically, my approach calls for researchers to measure confidence rather than just belief. Surveys that ask respondents what they believe and offer them only two reply options (yes/no) are inadequate. My study suggests, for example, that there can be a significant difference between those who *just believe* in God and those who have *no doubts* about the existence of God. Likewise, people who think heaven is "probably" there have been shown to act much differently than those who believe it "absolutely" exists.

Due to limitations of existing data, I could only provide preliminary insights into the differences better measures of confidence might make. It may be that the most effective confidence measures will give respondents the opportunity to report that they "know" certain religious doctrines are true. I suspect that confidence will be most likely to predict behavior among those who would answer in this way. Ultimately, scales that clearly distinguish between those who have various levels of doubt and those who have no doubts would be preferred. I recommend 10-point scales that might include extremes such as 1-I have no doubt that is false and 10-I have no doubt that is true or 1-I know [insert a statement] does not exist and 10-I know [insert a statement] does exist. I encourage others to incorporate the methodology used here into their studies focused on understanding the impact of any kind of belief, whether it is religious or more secular in nature.

Another issue to consider is more theoretical in nature. My theory suggests that supply-side proponents should stop assuming that pluralism necessarily breeds commitment due to stable preferences (Stark and Finke 2000). Preferences change, and many have provided useful evidence against the notion of constant demand for religion (Froese and Pfaff 2005; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Bruce 2002). Likewise, demand-side theorists are wrong to assert that individual religious habits will be shaped by macro forces despite what families, religious leaders, and religious organizations do. Secularization theorists might try to better deal with pockets of increasing religious confidence and commitment within societies. The theory has hardly even tried to explain why some, within any particular society, become more committed at the same time that others secularize.

Proponents on both sides could benefit from focusing more on endogenous group and family level indicators and their impact on localized commitment. How do societal-level factors impact local and familial religiosity? I suspect that the interaction between secularizing forces and religious leaders may also yield some productive insights into the dynamics of the relationship between local and societal-level religious change no matter which direction it goes. More historical work should be done to examine the fall *and rise* of religiosity as existential security improves and declines (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Explaining variation in demand at all levels and in every direction should be the ultimate goal.

Might I suggest that a merger of the supply-side and demand-side perspectives is in order? My theory suggests that religious leaders and groups can

shape religious demand by developing a culture of confidence that can resist the societal calls for religious erosion. In other words, the content of what is supplied by a religious culture can impact demand for it, whether to increase or diminish it. I have outlined the conditions under which it might be increased *and* diminished. I propose that the impact macro-level factors have on this process is only indirect through the influence of religious leaders, parents, and participants who have the power to determine the content of the religious culture presented to each succeeding generation.

Ultimately, I do not believe demand is constant, and I think that the nature of the product supplied can influence demand variation despite broader secularizing forces. It's not just about the energies and activities of religious leaders, but rather more about the religious product that they offer to adherents. You could have the most active minister in the business and still not produce high-commitment religion if the content is not solidarity-producing. On the other hand, as long as religious groups can supply certainty in solidarity-producing cultural content, they in effect are building demand for what they have to offer. Future studies might elaborate on the relationship between the nature of religious supply and whether or not there is demand for it, as well as the role of broader secularizing forces in the process of religious change.

Another area in need of further examination is the relationship between beliefs and preferences. While significant research has been done to examine the impact of religious preferences, very few researchers have tried to tackle the question

of religious belief head on. Unfortunately, in my attempt to thoroughly address the issue of belief and confidence, I have only been able to lightly touch on the connection between beliefs and preferences. It remains unclear how belief and preference formation relate and interact. Are beliefs and preferences the same thing? Do they directly correlate with each other? Does confidence reinforce preferences, or do preferences reinforce beliefs? The answers to these questions, while important, are beyond the scope of the current project. However, I might offer a few insights.

Arguments about why people convert to strict churches focus on preferences and how some people prefer more strict churches, or in other words, some people prefer to pay higher costs for religion (Stark and Finke 2000). This is a strange assertion for a rational choice theorist to make. If it is true that some individuals simply prefer to pay more and others do not, then what role do assumptions of benefit maximization play in choice-making?

It makes more sense to assert that it is not preferences that determine who will join a more strict church, but rather the content of one's beliefs and confidence in those beliefs that shapes the kind of religion one prefers. So, it is not simply that one prefers to sacrifice more for religion, but rather that he believes he must sacrifice more for religion and thus affiliates with a group that requires sacrifice. If a person comes to believe there is only One True God, then she will prefer monotheisms over polytheisms. If she strongly believes that sex before marriage is immoral, then she will likely gravitate toward a religion that prohibits such acts.

Ultimately, it may be that people prefer one thing, but believe another. Whether the preference trumps the belief in motivating action I think might depend on the level of confidence individuals have in the belief and consequently, how effective religions are at instilling confidence in their doctrines. More research needs to be done on how people's beliefs and convictions change in the process of conversion. My guess is that, in some cases, people in fact do change their preferences and come to prefer strictness because they believe in it strongly. Either way the expansive discussion of preference might greatly benefit from a more serious look at beliefs. At least beliefs need to be added to the analytical and theoretical mix in a more compelling and useful way.

REAL SOLIDARITY

I have not presented a theory about where ideas and beliefs come from, only about what makes some of them matter more than others. Ideas without someone to believe in them are empty and powerless. Ideas that require no action are socially irrelevant even when people do believe in them. The ideas that matter are the ones that require action and are believed. The more strongly they are believed, the more likely they are to produce action. If those actions are group-promoting, solidarity will be enhanced.

Real solidarity is not just compliance to rules based on the ability of a group to coerce its members or give them material riches. Rather it is the product of a way of thinking and living that a group of individuals strongly believes is right and necessary. One of the reasons religion is interesting to study is because it historically

has found much success in producing certainty in unseen objects. In fact, religion is unique in the modern world in its open attempts to rely on faith over empirical fact.

Of course, not all religions are equally focused on supernatural resources, but all acknowledge them at some level. If they do not, they might better be called secular organizations (tax-exempt status notwithstanding). Notably, the claims made by religion are only as good as the confidence individuals have in them. Ultimately, my work here suggests that religious groups should be more compelling and more lasting than secular ones to the extent that they do a better job of supplying certainty in confidence-producing content. The ability to rely on supernatural resources provides religion with greater access to such content. This is not to say that secular organizations cannot accomplish extremely high levels of solidarity. It only means it should be more difficult for them and thus less common.

An effective theory of solidarity has to account for strong and weak groups, those that survive and those that die. It also has to account for why individuals within those groups are willing to contribute and why they may not be. I have tried to address all of these issues. Of course, I have primarily applied these ideas to religion. I think religion is a good place to start because it is the part of culture most clearly focused on beliefs about ultimate truth, meaning, and morals. In a sense, it seems to be the institution that is most belief focused. However, researchers should never limit their analysis of belief to just the religious realm. Any institution or group that makes claims that must be taken on faith, and I think most of them do, will likely contain the elements I have found as confidence-producing in religion. What form they take,

how effective they are, and to what extent they result in social outcomes will vary. However, I suspect that as long as people believe in something, the study of content and confidence will provide a rich and satisfying source of study.

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