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Interstitial Religion:

Approaches to the Study of Religion on the Middle Ground

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Religious Studies

by

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Interstitial Religion: Approaches to the Study of Religion on the Middle Ground

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by

Jonathan Shawn Landres

In memory of Walter, Ninian, and Phil

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been many years in the making, and there are many people whose influence along the way has helped advance it. I have acknowledged a number of them in previous publications of the chapters that serve as the case studies for my arguments here; they have my deep gratitude, and I beg the forgiveness of those whom I fail to mention here.

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Janet L. Jacobs, whose generous reading of an early draft kept me hopeful that this was possible, once asked me why I was comfortable editing and amplifying the voices of others but did not seem to seek the same for myself; this dissertation is some corrective to that, but it would not exist in its current form but for the partnership of three sets of project collaborators—James V. Spickard and Meredith B. McGuire, Michael Berenbaum, and Oren Baruch Stier—with whom it was a great

pleasure to work as co-editor and from whom I learned much along the way. I also wish to thank my mentors at Oxford University's Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, in particular Jonathan Webber, Marcus Banks, and David Parkin; their influence is visible throughout the course of my research and writing, including this dissertation.

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whose love, support, and endless patience have made all the difference. Our daughters, Abigail and Natalia, have taught me to finish things, even when it is difficult to do so (at least that is what I keep telling them, so it is the least I can do to follow my own advice). My mother, Renata Landres, has taught me much, if not most, of what I know about learning and critical thinking; her support—moral, logistical, and financial—enabled and enhanced my studies and my research in countless ways. My late father, Dr. Peter Landres, dedicated his career in child and adolescent psychoanalysis to engaging with people as they are, beyond categories and labels, as I have attempted to do in my work here and elsewhere.

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* * *

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ABSTRACT

Interstitial Religion:
Case Studies Toward A Theory Of Religion As Networked Conversation

by

Jonathan Shawn Landres

Social science research in religion seems to be losing sight of the middle ground where institutions and individuals interact and thus struggles to offer a constructive response to the dilemmas facing scholars of religion more generally. In response, this dissertation aims to bolster the efforts of those calling for an examination of the connections between lived religion and institutional fields. Viewing religion as a field or network visible through the interaction of individuals and institutions within it makes clear the object of social research and indicates a reflexive method for ethnographic research. Specifically, it is proposed that: (a) religion in general is a discursive field or network of communication and communicative action, definable only within its specific situation; (b) *a “religion” in particular* is a set of cohesive segmentary social networks characterized by discourse and communicative action in service of whatever is situationally defined as religious (most typically involving motivations and purposes commonly apprehended as

related to the ultimate conditions of human existence); (c) lived religion, therefore, is empirically visible to the scholar solely through language and behavior by agents acting within those social networks; and (d) because of his or her active role in perceiving and interacting with and within the social networks that structure religious fields, the empirical scholar inherently and inevitably is a part of the field itself, which simply cannot exist without the relationship between the researcher and the object of study. These claims are illustrated with case studies using a variety of empirical methods; many underlying concerns remain the same regardless of how a particular situation is examined. Two cases (Japanese *mizuko kuyo* rituals and the True Love Waits chastity campaign) are based on analysis of primary and secondary sources, three others in ethnographic field research (Jews in postsocialist Slovakia, a “Generation X” church, and a Jewish seeker service), and one case (the Jewish emergent phenomenon) in a combination. The cases illustrate how to define and study religion empirically when it seems to be visible primarily in the interstitial middle ground where people articulate their sense of self and negotiate their relationships with one another.

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ONE. INTRODUCTION

There is something in the act of looking in a mirror that resembles a question. It is as if one were asking, “Who am I? And what is my place in the world?” In one sense, looking in the mirror initiates a kind of dialogue, not only with oneself but also with the outside world. One compares expectations with what one sees, and measures an inner sense of the nature of existence against whatever standards the outside world holds up as the norm. To see in the mirror something so different that it is no longer identifiable as oneself provokes a curiously disturbing dilemma—and it is precisely this dilemma, I believe, that has confronted the social scientific study of religion under the conditions of secularization we have encountered in, and increasingly beyond, the modern West.¹ Identity in general and religious identity in particular is increasingly reflective and intentional, and ever more often a matter of public and private turmoil.

1. Looking around for religion when it’s right in front of us

For nearly two decades, I have pursued my interest in the continuing

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use the term secularization and the phrasing “in the wake of secularization” or “after secularization” advisedly. To me, the notion of the “post-secular” seems to be a false binary, that there was at some point a purely “pre-secular” (for a brief history of academic attention to “the secular,” see Bullivant & Lee, 2012). Instead, I prefer to look at secularization as political and social processes that continue to be negotiated and within which religion is being reconfigured (in this, I follow Casanova 2011). Like Courtney Bender and others (see for example, Bender, 2013, pp. 145-147, 155; see also Taves & Bender, 2012), I am unconvinced that secularization remains conceptually useful, but I tend to think that terms such as “the secular,” “secularity” and “secularism” risk recreating similar problems, simply from a different perspective (see Lee, 2012). Whereas, Bender cautiously endorses “pluralism” as an alternative, I will propose “pluralization” below.

relevance of religion in the modern world. In general, I have been interested in how people advance a religious identity through the dynamic of their relations to one another. Even in the wake of centuries of disenchantment, disestablishment, differentiation, and even decline, it is the presumed absence or irrelevance of religion that strikes me as counterintuitive, not its curious presence despite a claimed growing dominance of the secular; after all, as of 2010, 84% of the world's population was "religiously affiliated" in one way or another, and "many of the unaffiliated hold some religious or spiritual beliefs (such as belief in God or a universal spirit) even though they do not identify with a particular faith" (Pew Research Center, 2012, p. 9). Of the "religiously unaffiliated" remainder, 76% live in the Asia-Pacific region, not an area necessarily associated with pervasive secularity as it is understood in the West.

Still, something has changed in the study of religion and I am disquieted by it. Kocku von Stuckrad elegantly describes what he and some other scholars see as the most serious "crises" facing the study of religion as "the crisis of representation, the situated observer, and the dilemma of essentialism and relativism" (von Stuckrad, 2003, p. 257; see also Hackett, 2005, pp. 154-157). The first is related to what it is the scholar can claim to be describing when she or he reports on religion; the second to the relationship between the scholar and the field; and the third to the possibility of ever defining the phenomenon under study. More recently, Jason Bivins bemoans the "methodological kenosis" plaguing the discipline of American religious studies—what he calls, if not the Big Lie, then the "most resonant" one:

that we can settle these matters by endlessly appealing to discourse, arriving at our institutional identity by making those last tweaks to the politics of representation and agency. In serving the complexity we trumpet, we write on; yet this writing is always interdisciplinary, obscuring terms, boundaries, and the discipline's distinctiveness. (Bivins, 2012, p. 404)

He calls for us to “envision ‘also’ rather than ‘instead,’ and entertain a playfulness with text, genre, and address” (Bivins, 2012, p. 405)—to use an analogy from sport, to focus on the messy chaos of the game on the playing field, and not just the view from the Goodyear Blimp above or from the ball in motion.

A decade ago, James Spickard, Meredith McGuire, and I took up some of these challenges as they presented themselves through the ethnography of religion (Spickard, McGuire, & Landres, 2002; my chapter in that volume forms Chapter 8 of this dissertation), and we called for greater reflexivity among scholars and—though it was more implied than explicit—greater humility about our ability to access “truth” and report it truthfully. A decade later, current state-of-the-art theorizing in religious studies attempts to solve these issues by sidestepping them—not intentionally, to be sure, but nevertheless with that effect. To explain what I mean, I offer the following two analogs:

Game day, take 1. Interstate 105 is backed up because heavy game-day traffic on Interstate 10 led to a fender-bender on the I-110 to I-10 interchange. Grocery stores in Boyle Heights, West Hollywood, and Westchester are running low on chips, dip, and beer (Negro Modelo in Boyle Heights, IPAs in West Hollywood, and Heineken in Westchester) but report a surplus of fresh fruit. Next week, they will adjust their orders accordingly, indirectly catalyzing a net loss of two jobs from the Central Coast and a net gain of one job in Mexico City. The cost of impressions and click-throughs on sports-related websites originating in the Los Angeles area has increased by 10% over the past two hours. Nielsen television ratings analysts continue their debate about how to account for households that switch channels to watch the game but digitally record simultaneous programming (via their cable set-top

boxes), they will watch later that night on their iPads using Slingbox technology. Alcohol-related arrests are up 10% over the previous day but down 3% from the previous big game. Local lawmakers pause their bickering to watch the game together; the fellow-feeling the time together inspires will help them reach a budget deal three months later. Because a mother in North Hollywood is distracted by a spectacular play, she fails to notice that her three-year-old son is playing submarine in the wading pool. Her brother-in-law, visiting for the first time from New Zealand, grabs him out of the water and decides to take him for a walk; their relationship, born in that moment, will span sixty years and four continents—and it will be the brother-in-law who introduces the boy to his future husband.

Game day, take 2. The ball was manufactured six months ago in a factory in Ohio. Its leather came from a lean young steer in Kansas, raised on a diet of GMO corn, soy, and grasses. While it was being checked against NCAA regulations, an inspector found it to be slightly larger than usual and asked her supervisor to verify that it was within the size limits; the supervisor determined that it was, with a smile declaring the cowhide ball to be a “kosher pigskin.” Each of the two teams’ starting quarterbacks have had a chance to throw the ball before the game; the one with slightly larger hands found it easier to grip than the other, but both felt comfortable with it. During the game, the ball changes hands approximately 500 times among 15 different people, while traveling a total of 2.8 miles (2.2 miles in the air and 0.6 miles being carried) at an average speed of 39 miles per hour (65 mph in the air and 18 mph being carried). The furthest it travels in the air at any one time is 85 yards; the furthest it travels in a player’s arms is 42 yards; it hits the ground 17 times during the game. The ball’s air pressure falls from 13.5 psi to 12.5 psi over the course of the game from having been crushed a number of times. Feeling the softer, slightly tackier grip, the team captain with the larger-handed quarterback asks to switch balls but the referee rules that the ball is within regulation limits. After the game, the winning team’s quarterback, a nationally recognized sports celebrity, signs the ball for a 12 year-old girl with a terminal illness who was brought to meet him. Years later, her parents will look at the ball, now enshrined in a Lucite box on their mantle, whenever they want to recall the happiest memories of their brief time with their daughter.

Here are two precise, accurate, coherent, ethnographically “true” paragraphs, which attend to self-evidently important information, without which we cannot claim to have a full understanding of the situation. Absent, of course, from either of these is any discussion of the game itself—American football. There is no account of the

purpose and rules of the game, the constitution of the teams, the plays they run, the structure and history of the teams, the location of the game, or anything else that actually has to do with what most people interested in football—whether athletes, spectators, or analysts—actually care about.

To return to the field at hand: social science research in religion seems to be losing sight of the interstitial middle ground where institutions and individuals interact and thus struggles to offer a constructive response to the dilemmas facing scholars of religion more generally. On the one hand social theorists have moved from “secularization” to “rethinking the secular,” engaging important philosophical and critical questions and exploring the presences, absences, and social flows that are the outcome of centuries of negotiation among different components of the sacred and the secular. On the other hand, anxieties about defining religion and rumblings about the postmodern have led to a theoretical and methodological individualism focused on getting the *sui generis* elemental definitions right and clarifying the individual’s independent authority to signify and enact the “religious.”

To my reading, both macrosociological projects (e.g., Bender & Klassen, 2010; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011; Gorski, 2012) and microsociological ones (e.g., Ammerman, 2007; Bender, Cadge, Levitt, & Smilde, 2013; Bender & Taves, 2012) seem not only more concerned with reconfiguring the study of religion within the broader discipline of sociology but also with strengthening the methodological and philosophical links between meso/organizational dynamics and the macro/public-political dynamics, leaving

somewhat unattended the space of interpersonal connections between institutional processes and unmediated individual experience.

However, if we are to be able to analyze “the empirical variation in practices oriented to sacralization, the institutions (religious and other) that facilitate such practices, and the resulting religious experiences and moral orders that emerge in specific times and places” (Edgell, 2012, p. 255), then we must pay greater attention to that interstitial middle ground connecting the institutional and the individual, where most of these practices take place. Studies of the individual construction of religion (or “value” or whatever term is used) are important. However, they too often fail to address the ways in which religious identity, meaning, and priority are negotiated and constructed among people who consider one another co-religionists (or at least see themselves as participants in the same conversation). Moreover, while no institutional form deserves methodological privilege, nevertheless, most people *do* religion in particular types of groupings, whether in congregations or via shared rituals or through having certain language and even social labels in common. Thus, the focus on the individual at the explicit expense of the institution gives both short shrift—and leaves religion (empirically visible only through social interaction) oddly uprooted from its most natural and fertile contexts.

This is not at all to say that institutions have been over-represented as such in the study of religion; to be sure, religious institutions—whether massive hierarchies such as the Roman Catholic Church or individual storefront congregations—have enjoyed great privilege, both substantively and methodologically, in the empirical

study of religion. Nor is it to say that sociologists and anthropologists do not locate religion elsewhere; of course we do, and we have for many years. However, it is concerning to me to see—in 2013—continued calls to move “beyond” or “outside of” institutions and congregations. To my mind, it is a protest too much that attributes too much power to the institution, the existence of which is, at best, the sum total of the imaginations of those for whom its existence is relevant. As Randall Collins rightly notes:

the “society” that is held together is no abstract unity of a social system, but is just those groups of people assembled in particular places who feel solidarity with each other through the effects of ritual participation and ritually charged symbolism. (Collins, 2004, p. 41)

The same is no less true of institutions.² Roger Friedland argues that institutions have no substantive propositional existence but rather have a logic only because their “practices and substances are internally co-constitutive” (Friedland, 2009, p. 63). Thus, it is not either-or, not a choice between institutions or individuals, religion or “the secular,” nor insider or outsider. It is both-and, all at once, with all too infrequent moments of clarity for those of us who spend our time looking for insights into the social and cultural manifestations of religion.

2. Religion on the (middle) ground

When I was young, I used to repeat the appeal to unnamed authority: “They say....” Who, my parents challenged me, is “they,” and why are they saying it? Marcus Banks (1996) argues that there really is no such thing as ethnicity, except

² For that matter, the same is true of ethnicity. See Banks 1996.

when someone says there is. The same is true of religion: to those of us who attempt to be empirical observers, religion appears to us not simply when someone says it is there, but when we also agree—or when we decide that it is there, irrespective of anyone else’s opinion. And if that is the case, then we need alternative ways of observing religion, ones that do not depend on presupposed social or institutional boundaries but require us to take into account not only the “groups of people assembled” (whether face-to-face, virtually, or by imagination), but our own embeddedness and complicity in the very act of naming, describing, and occasionally venturing to explain.

In response, this dissertation seeks to advance the study of communal religious activity in the wake of social secularization,³ and as such, it is focused on the situation in advanced industrialized societies (see Norris & Inglehart, 2004, 2011). My objective is to map a path through the thicket of debates over “secularization theory” and “new paradigms,” debates that have repeatedly debunked “institutions”

³ “Social secularization refers to everyday religious experience, practice, and belief and to the penetration of that everyday world by the secular market and secular values” (Turner, 2012, p. 141). It is distinct from “political secularization,” which “refers specifically to the issue around the historical separation of church and state...[and] a number of institutional arrangements for the management of religion in the public domain, such as secular law versus religious laws, secular schooling versus religious schools, and the independence of the priesthood and ministry from the state” (Turner, 2012, pp. 140-141). Although others propose moving from secularization to secularism (e.g., Taves & Bender, 2012, pp. 3-9), the focus of this dissertation remains focused on secularization itself and attempts to address its limitations through specificity (social secularization as opposed to other types) and through moving beyond it entirely to other approaches, in large part, as Titus Hjelm points, because “deseccularization implies a *process* that is dialectical and reversible” and “the fact that religion is back on the agenda quantitatively is not a sufficient measure for abandoning secularization as such ...religious communities are reasserting themselves as public actors, but ...their discourse is increasingly secular” (Hjelm, 2013, p. 13).

only to recreate them in new forms. I propose a working approach to the study of religion that not only makes clear the object of sociological and social anthropological study but also indicate a reflexive method for ethnographic research.

We can better understand the interstitial middle ground if, for the purposes at stake here, we view religion as a field or network visible through action (much in the way that we can map the United States without reference to terrain but just by looking at a night-time satellite photo of town and city lights, or a freeway system just by looking at headlights and taillights). Religion, if viewed in this way, would present the following methodological implications:

- a) religion in general is a discursive field of communication and communicative action, definable only within its specific situation or context;⁴
- b) a “religion” *in particular* is a set of cohesive segmentary⁵ social networks characterized by discourse and communicative action in service of whatever is situationally defined as religious (most typically involving motivations and

⁴ See Swatos 1990 for a more extensive discussion of the benefits of a situation-based definition of religion. Moberg argues that “a basic starting point for a discourse analytic approach to religion must be to regard the very category of ‘religion’ as an ‘empty signifier’ that has no intrinsic meaning in itself. The meaning of the category of ‘religion’ needs to be viewed as always being constructed and informed by the particular discourses that surround it in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts” (Moberg 2013, p. 13). The late Robert Bellah put it in even more pragmatic terms: “in the end I would be tempted to follow Weber in *The Sociology of Religion* (1920), in which he writes that he will not define religion at the beginning but only at the end of the book, after the reader knows from his examples what he means by the term. But at the end he doesn’t define religion either. Surely for me it is my examples that carry my definition; the definitions early on are only to get things started” (Bellah 2012, p. 261).

⁵ The term segmentary is drawn from social anthropology; it refers to internal social boundaries that differentiate specific parts, or segments, of a whole, from one another.

purposes commonly apprehended as related to the ultimate conditions of human existence);⁶

- c) lived religion, therefore, is empirically visible to the scholar solely through language and behavior by agents acting within those social networks
- d) because of his or her active role in perceiving and interacting with and within the social networks that structure religious fields, the empirical scholar inherently and inevitably is a part of the field itself, which simply cannot exist without the relationship between the ethnographer and the object of study.

I will demonstrate the usefulness of an action-oriented approach to understanding the interstitial middle ground by focusing on the process of community formation and re-formation, specifically on the terms of connection that define religious recognition—the ways that religious actors, whether institutional or individual, understand one another to be part of the same community and engage one another in action for shared purposes. I will do so by exploring these claims through a reconsideration of secularization theory and the introduction of approaches rooted in social network theories. In the chapters that follow, I will unpack them further through case studies that helped prompt the reconstruction. In many respects, this is an archeology of theory: The case studies represent slightly more than a decade of empirical research and participant observation in different settings (both library-based and field-based), after which I sought to understand what it was that connected these otherwise independent inquiries.

⁶ Adapted from Bellah, 1964, p. 359.

3. Methodo(travel)ogue: around the world and back again

The case studies I have chosen to include here span the globe, from Japanese temples to the Southern Baptist Convention, from central Slovakia to southern California. This is not tourism but travel: as Mark Juergensmeyer observes:

to study religious phenomena in a global world requires a global stretch of imagination, since it implies not only the study of ideas and communities, wherever in the world they might be, but also an understanding of how the world is viewed from multiple perspectives. (Meyer, Barker, Ebaugh, & Juergensmeyer, 2011, pp. 247-248)

Indeed, in many respects, it was the experience of pursuing such seemingly divergent inquiries, global both geographically and conceptually, that led me to consider the epistemological assumptions driving my research, the methodological parameters and implications of my approach to ethnographic fieldwork, and ultimately, the theoretical suppositions that connect them together. The case studies utilize a variety of empirical methods, suggesting that the underlying theoretical concerns remain the same regardless of how a particular situation is examined. Two of the cases (in Chapters Three and Four) are based exclusively on analysis of primary and secondary sources; three others are rooted in ethnographic field research (in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven); and one case (also in Chapter Seven) is based in a combination of the two. Each case has partially illuminated one or another aspect of what emerged as the broader problem: how to define and study religion empirically when it seems to be visible primarily in the ways that people articulate their sense of self and negotiate their relationships with one another.

Though what initially united the cases was the accident of my having written them, the effect of their combination is, I believe, more than coincidental. If, as Kocku von Stuckrad argues, a discursive approach to the study of religion plays an important integrating function, then a measuring-stick for my argument is whether it holds up under the scrutiny of completed fieldwork not susceptible to my manipulation in service of theories I brought with me to the field. It is not just that “by fostering multiple perspectives and approaches to its subject, it makes visible dynamic networks of identities and meanings”—this is inherent in discourse itself—but rather that “academic concepts are generated in a communicative and discursive procedure, in which the variables change constantly under temporal and local conditions” (von Stuckrad, 2003, p. 268). Taken together in their relative diversity—methodological, geographic, and organizational—they serve as a proving ground for concepts that to have validity must add value in as many situations as possible:

A meta-theory of the study of religion relates those variables to one another and creates a dynamic system of mutually interacting cultural forces. There is no way of escaping the relativistic stance that leads to methodological dilemmas. But discursive study of religion provides an instrument for coping with it, because it makes those conflicting strategies visible on a higher level of analysis. (von Stuckrad, 2003, p. 268)

To be sure, the case studies may not connect as elegantly as a pre-planned multi-sited ethnography might have done, but they serve their purpose, which is to demonstrate the practicality and applicability of my approach. Justifying his own discursive program, Kenneth Granholm puts this well:

the aim here is not to present ‘definitive’ answers to what comprises specific currents, but to exemplify how the model presented ...can be put to practical use. Thus other scholars, particularly with a more focused approach on

specific currents, might identify different discursive components as the most central ones. A discourse-analytical approach as presented here is not concerned with providing ‘more true’ explanations but about what is analytically consistent and useful, and thus the choice of discursive components comprising a particular current may differ according to analytical context, perspective and the specific research questions that need to be answered. (Granholm, 2013, p. 55)

This dissertation thus unfolds through a version of what Michael Burawoy calls the extended case method, which “seeks to uncover the macro foundations of a microsociology. It takes the social situation as the point of empirical examination and works with given general concepts ...to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures” (Burawoy, 1991b, p. 274).⁷ Applying such a method to as disparate a group as my own entails what Wade Clark Roof (2011) calls “triangulation”: “the principle of obtaining multiple ‘soundings’ on a phenomenon, using differing approaches to the study”:

The fundamental argument for triangulation in whatever way it occurs is two-fold: first, alternative methods of study are complementary, each serving to round-out the picture of what amounts to a composite set of information; second, triangulation serves as a check on the researcher’s subjectivity, the point being that the greater the number of “soundings” relating to a research question the less likely it is that researchers can dismiss or twist evidence in favor of their own inclinations. (Roof, 2011, pp. 74-75)

The use of multiple cases also can contribute a triangulation of a different type: reconsidering and reconstructing of existing theory instead of adding to the proliferation of new ones (see Burawoy, 1991a, p. 26).

⁷ For clarity’s sake, the extended case study method, which looks for theoretical commonalities in dissimilar situations, is different from multi-site ethnography, which conceptualizes a single field comprising multiple locations (Coleman & Von Hellerman 2012; cf. Marcus 1995).

4. New perspectives on persistent dilemmas

To be clear: in this dissertation, I do not offer a new *explanatory theory* for religion or religious behavior. Rather, I propose a new *way of looking at* the religious field, one that takes into account the researcher's own relationship to the object of study and is congruent with situational definitions of what is under study; as Manuel Vásquez notes:

we cannot rely on universal, a priori definitions of religion. Rather, we must be attentive to ways in which local, grassroots, official, national, and transnational actors define and live religion. These multiple situated perspectives (which often lead to contested canons, traditions, and orthodoxies), in interplay with the researcher's own unstable positionality, determine the object of study. (Vásquez, 2008, p. 156)

My approach also complements others currently under development within other subfields of religious studies. A key example is Ann Taves's project, which draws from her extensive studies of religious experience (see, for example, Taves, 1999). She begins with the question of "what an attributional approach to religious experience might look like, that is, what it would mean to focus on experiences people *deem* religious" (2010, p. 317). An attributional approach, she writes, is "an implicit building block method concerned to analyze the parts that make up the whole, and an insistence on comparisons both to other religions and to "secular life"" (2010, p. 318). Ultimately, then, the study of religion (beyond religious experiences) requires a focus on "the component parts or building blocks that can be assembled in various ways to create more complex socio-cultural formations, some of which

people characterize as ‘religions’ or ‘spiritualities’ or ‘paths’” (2009, p. 162). Taves observes:

the elementary phenomena [of religion] might best be understood broadly and generically as things that people consider special (special things, for short) and that religions (and spiritualities and philosophies) are often organized around path schemas that involve special practices and/or special goals. In their more elaborated forms, we can view religions, philosophies, paths, etc., as systems or frameworks for assessing, ranking, manipulating, and sometimes transcending things that matter (and, thus, are viewed as special). (2010c, p. 175)

This is a valuable complement to my discussion here, and the complementarity may help us better understand the relationships between individual and collective religious experiences and expressions, the more so “in the late modern context where people participate in multiple and often contradictory communities or impersonal collectivities” (McGuire, 2008, p. 229). However, as I will discuss in greater detail below, my approach, to a somewhat greater degree than Taves’s, begins not so much with experience as with the social interactions among people who already have deemed these experiences to be special as well as people who are potentially open to consider deeming claims (i.e., institutional and community leaders, current members, and prospective participants). This choice is a matter of both epistemology and focus: it follows from the premise that religion is observable through social negotiation, but it should not imply any claim that the observations cannot take elsewhere than in organizational and organization-like settings. If Bender and Klassen ask, in a related context, “Where does the production of religious distinction take place: at what social and cultural points, at what practical, discursive, or structural levels? What makes

certain religious groups and their actions observable and others not?” (Bender & Klassen, 2010, p. 18), this dissertation attends to observing social and cultural processes play out through discourse among institutional and individual actors. As Philip Gorski and Ateş Altınordu observe:

Whereas many open questions remain about trends in individual practice and belief, far more remain about meso- and macro-level changes in religion and society. This is partly because sociologists have done so little research on these issues and partly because they have not fully mined the research already done by nonsociologists. (Gorski & Altınordu, 2008, p. 66)

To that end, in this dissertation, I offer a slight corrective to the “beyond-the-institution” and “beyond-the-congregation” cant of some recent theoretical explorations; for example, the approaches outlined here document the extent to which “taken for granted” religious sites (Bender, 2012, p. 45) offer the researcher ample opportunity to look at the contested spaces, flows, and networks that characterize religious dynamics.⁸ Moreover, I do so here primarily through the lens of social anthropology, a discipline that has had a great deal to say about secularization and the secular, very little of which has made it into the sociological discourse in religion.

Recognizing, of course, that individuals in advanced industrialized societies have become their own producers, brokers, and purveyors of cultural knowledge, this argument also attends less to the idealized expectations of “official religion” and adopts a “lived religion” approach. Clifford Geertz, for instance, emphasizes:

⁸ I am indebted to Vásquez (2008) for his keen observation about the popularity of spatial, hydraulic, and relational metaphors in the study of religion.

the way in which a people's, a group's, or an individual's most comprehensive ideas of order, their world-view, and the pervading tone and temper of their lived life, their ethos, are made to complete and reinforce one another in religious practice: in ritual, in myth, in spiritual discipline, in the reflexive pieties of everyday life (Geertz, 2005, p. 7).⁹

Attending to this interstitial middle ground more effectively would have a number of payoffs. It would bolster the efforts of those calling for an examination of the connections between lived religion and institutional fields (see Edgell, 2012, pp. 254-255).¹⁰ Among them is that it demonstrates that we do not require a differentiation between “congregations and other self-evidently religious organizations” and other locations for religiousness in order to achieve “a stronger engagement with the ‘secular’ or ‘postsecular’ turn in recent theorization of religion” (Bender, Cadge, Levitt, & Smilde, 2013, p. 10). Moreover, by removing any privilege, institutional or not, the approach advanced here requires the researcher to define the field of study even more precisely, and, to paraphrase Friedland, to attend more closely to the “how” and the “why” than to the “what.”¹¹

⁹ To study such processes is a challenge; as Geertz puts it, “one doesn’t, after all, so much ‘examine’ religion, ‘investigate’ it, or even ‘research’ it, as circumambulate it. Skulking about at the edge of the grove, one watches it happen” (Geertz, 2005, pp. 13-14).

¹⁰ As Friedland puts it, “institutional fields are structures of symbolically constituted, iterated powers whose exercise through interlocked congeries of practices...carried out by collectively recognized subjects—citizens, owners, congregants, families, officials, and scientists, which presume and performatively produce values—democracy, property, divinity, love, sovereignty, and knowledge” (Friedland, 2009, p. 56).

¹¹ “Social theory, and social movement theory in its various iterations of resource mobilization, has tended to focus on the structural question, the legitimate distributions of the good as opposed to the systemic question of the legitimacy and practical logic of goods, on

Given all of this, is it possible to identify a “community,” let alone a formally bounded one such as a congregation? I am mindful of Craig Calhoun’s caution that “the distinction between the secular and the religious...obscures both the ways in which religious people engage the temporal world and the ways in which states and other this-world institutional structures inform the idea of religion itself” (Calhoun, 2012, p. 360). In the same volume, Courtney Bender argues:

taken-for-granted modes of determining the best place to study or understand religion—and its positions in modern life—currently limit our collective ability to seek satisfactory answers to the questions posed by the post- secular turn. Beginning with self-evidently religious places and individuals may indeed show us some of the complex dynamics of religious-secular binaries, but they do not offer ways of theorizing or analyzing some of the more challenging aspects of modern religion, especially those elements that seem to thrive “outside” of the milieus and spaces that are normally deemed religious. (Bender, 2012, p. 45)

Although at least three of my cases at least touch on intersections beyond purely “taken for granted” places, whether with women after abortion or miscarriage, teens interacting outside congregational contexts, or central Slovak Jews uncertain about what space they occupy in the first place; nevertheless, I do not agree that using conventional sites puts us at a theoretical disadvantage (see Ammerman, 2003, pp. 216-218).¹² As Calhoun (2012) implies but does not state explicitly, the secularization

who gets what as opposed to how and what is produced and distributed” (Friedland, 2009, p. 50).

¹² See also Ammerman (2003, pp. 216-217, 218): “if we are to understand religious identities...we must begin by attending to episodes of social interaction (whether face-to-face or mediated) that are emplotted in a *religious* narrative—one in which ‘religious’ actors, ideas, institutions, and experiences play a role in the story of who we are and who I am. ...If we take structured-yet-improvised episodes of social interaction as our basis and recognize the necessary intersectionality of all such episodes, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that all religious episodes will only happen in religious institutions or in private seclusion. ...

process also refers to the ways in which religious explanations and religious institutions increasingly must negotiate with the otherwise-religious and the secular. The case study method, combined with what Mark Juergensmeyer (2011) has called a “sociotheological turn,” offers a way through the dilemma. Sociotheology, in Juergensmeyer’s description:

incorporates the insider-oriented attempt to understand the reality of a particular world view, and it tries to do what the field of theology has classically done, long before the advent of the modern academic disciplines: structure the social, ethical, political, and spiritual aspects of a culture’s ideas and meanings into a coherent whole (Juergensmeyer, 2011, p. 891)

while simultaneously ensuring that it:

does not privilege any one religious tradition, ...applies its analytic styles equally to any tradition or world view; ...brackets truth claims asserted by either the subject of the study or by the analyst studying it; and ...takes seriously the social location in which a view of the world emerges and the social consequences of a particular way of thinking about reality. (Juergensmeyer, 2011, p. 892).

This sociotheological turn resonates with Cannell’s call for anthropologists—ethnographers especially—to recapture their “sense of engagement” with religious traditions in order to deepen their situational understanding and sharpen their ability to reflect critically on the dynamics at play (Cannell, 2006, p. 45). Indeed, ethnography as practiced by an informed participant observer affords the opportunity for such engagement.

While religious organizations generate and sustain powerful narratives, the intersectionality of identities and the permeability of modern institutional boundaries guarantees that these narratives will not remain singular or untouched.” This offers further support not only to an approach focused on discourse (over such narrative) but also one located both within and beyond “taken for granted” settings.

My experiment here with sociotheology (as will be evident in later chapters) is an attempt to demonstrate that type of engagement by bridging both congregation-based and less strictly institutional or “taken for granted” forms of religious connection using case studies that unpack the framework presented above. In the first case, on *mizuko kuyo*, a ritual performed by some Japanese women following abortion or miscarriage, I explore the building blocks of the discursive religious field. In the second case, I turn to the (Southern) Baptist Sunday School Board’s True Love Waits chastity campaign, in order to consider similar phenomena beyond formal institutional boundaries but within a shared subculture. The third case, of post-socialist Jewish identity in central Slovakia, moves beyond questions of cultural self-inscription to look at language and behavior by agents acting within a segmentary social network whose existence is not debated but whose boundaries are a matter of personal and communal negotiation, rather than institutional definition. Returning to the United States for the last three cases, I consider three different congregational models, all of which are heirs in some form to the seeker religion movement of the 1990s. My fieldwork at New Song Church, a “Generation X” church, revealed complex patterns of self-definition and negotiated rule making. At Friday Night Live, an outreach-oriented synagogue service, the institution serves as a platform on which prospective network members are encouraged to “try on” their relationships with belonging and with their sense of the divine (see Turner, 2012, p. 152; see also Smilde, 2012, pp. 58-62) Finally, an extended essay on the Jewish emergent phenomenon considers what could be happening when congregations are built on an

intentionally post-institutional, relationship-based model—in short, a model that takes this dissertation’s approach to the study of religion almost as an implicit given. Interwoven with the case studies are additional theoretical and methodological observations that contextualize them within the broader discourses of religious studies, sociology of religion, social anthropology, and Jewish studies.

There are a number of preliminary questions and themes related to the definition advanced above and specific to the ethnographic approaches at stake here, that link the case studies to one another. First, where and how is the communicative action made visible to the researcher? In addition to methodological questions, this takes into account the formality or fluidity of the language being studied: written or oral, formatted for public consumption or internal documentation, exchanges in interviews or observed social interactions. Second, who primarily is advancing the agenda, the élites setting the stage (whether institutional or social), or the participants negotiating their relationships with the process and with one another? Third, where is the action located: is it based in a specific physical place, diffused across multiple specific places, or diffused within a broader culture or subculture? Fourth, are the boundaries of the process fixed in a place or in institutionally defined doctrine, or are they more porous with respect to access or insider-versus-outsider status. Finally, in each case, how physically or socially embedded was I as a researcher: was I entirely detached, conducting a documentary analysis from afar, or was I actively engaged in interacting with the institutions and their participants?

5. Case by case: recognition, differentiation, intimacy, pillarization

Taken together, the cases illustrate the theoretical project of this dissertation—the reclamation of the middle ground as a discursive field of communication and communicative action through the study of religious connectedness. There have two other important elements in common with one another. First, they all describe situations where there are complex insider-outsider dynamics at play with respect to the broader secularized culture; second, in each case, there is a negotiation over what is normative. These two elements are key components for group identification, and as such, focusing on them is an alternative to relying on imposed categories such as “institutions” or “congregations.” Any situation with an insider-outsider dynamic and a bounded discourse about what is normative, therefore, can be defined as a social field and investigated as such.

To some degree, the insider-outsider dynamics in the case studies reflect sacralization occurring not as a reversal of, but rather in the wake of, secularization (see Demerath, 2007, pp. 65-67; Turner, 2012, p. 137). In some (i.e., *mizuko kuyo* and True Love Waits), the institution seeks to resist or even overcome values and practices that are anathema to the institutional leadership, not only because they are “reflections of a corrupt secular society in need of religious improvement” (Calhoun, 2012, p. 342), but also, arguably, because the institutional élite may believe that its intervention may help reverse the trend of secularization itself (Calhoun, 2012, p. 337). In others, (i.e., New Song, Friday Night Live, and Jewish emergent) the outside culture shapes and is fully engaged by the internal communal experience. In the

central Slovak Jewish case, the inside/outside dynamic is itself the primary object of study. However, whereas the situation at Friday Night Live is one largely affirming, even inclusive, of broader culture, the situation in central Slovakia, at New Song, and even in the Jewish emergent phenomenon is one of coping rather than affirmation. The second broad element is that in each case there is a negotiation over what is normative.

With respect to negotiation over the normative, the core sociotheological questions (pace Juergensmeyer, 2011) range from gender roles (*mizuko kuyo*) and doctrinal beliefs about sexual behavior (True Love Waits) to the individual's authority to self-define (central Slovak Jewry) or the process by which communal rules are made (New Song). While all the cases in one way or another touch on claims about the relevance of religion to everyday life and the nature of institutions, these latter questions are most visible at Friday Night Live and in the Jewish emergent phenomenon.

The two dynamics have the additional benefit of enabling a response to Edgell's call for a research agenda with "orienting questions that span social contexts and levels of analysis and that avoid some of the problems associated with market and secularization approaches" (Edgell, 2012, p. 257). Observing and describing negotiation over the normative is one way of documenting the "inherently contested process of providing cultural coherence" in a way that enables "analyses of religious change that do not automatically orient to the secularization debate"; moreover, the recasting of insider/outsider dynamics reflects the understanding that "identity is

always inherently fluid and intersectional, with boundaries that are actively made and defended (or blurred and changed)” (Edgell, 2012, p. 258).

We can go a step further and connect those two themes—the religious/secular dynamic and negotiation over the normative—to another in what amounts to a four-box analytical toolkit,¹³ which highlight four conceptual sites where observation of the insider-outsider dynamics at play with respect to the broader secularized culture, as well as the negotiation over what is normative, may be possible: recognition, differentiation, intimacy, and pillarization.

Table 1: Where to look

	Interpersonal Norms	Collective Norms
Inside (Sacralized)	recognition	intimacy
Outside (Secularized)	differentiation	pillarization

Recognition refers to the “shared script” (noted above) through which people actively define themselves through the articulation of a particular way of being in the world, rather than by engaging in propositional theological debates (although some may do both, of course). In certain collective or institutional settings, certain people—institutional élites—have the power to recognize (or not) and enforce that recognition. Differentiation takes as a given the diversity of religious groups in a society and refers to the reflexive need to make group-versus-group distinctions that results from the existence of co-existent communities of divergent practice. In this sense, recognition and differentiation are inextricably linked; as noted above, people *recognize* themselves as part of a group by *differentiating* “what we do” from “what

¹³ Known in Santa Barbara as a Phillip Hammond special.

they do” (i.e., practice). The idea of intimacy reflects the shift from institutional framework to an interpersonal, relational dynamic as the organizing principle for collective action (see Giddens, 1992, p. 58). Finally, pillarization at the institutional level refers to the “bundling” (or, frequently re-bundling) of religious collectivities to provide a coherent strategy for living. Far denser and more personal than “hatch, match, and dispatch,” pillarization enables a group, institution, or network to respond to the needs (which may be either sacralized or secularized) of the individuals they engage and serve. These four conceptual sites are visible in each of the case studies that follow (see Table 2).

The opening case study in Chapter Three demonstrates how my interstitial view of religion enables the resolution of an apparent conflict over interpretation. It examines the *mizuko kuyo* ritual, performed by women following abortion or miscarriage. Previous scholarly interpretation of the ritual attempted to resolve the apparently conflicting relationship between the structure of the *mizuko kuyo* ritual and Shinto-Buddhist doctrines. However, no scholarship seemed to have addressed the question, “Why *mizuko kuyo*?” from the perspective of the people involved as supplicants and producers. The case study proposes instead to reconsider the terms of connection, locating the meaning of the ritual not in its relationship to propositional doctrine but rather in its relationship with those who produce and perform it. By shifting attention to the relationship between women and the performance of the ritual, the case illuminates a somewhat more complex dynamic. The resulting view, rooted in the nature of the action on the ritual field itself, highlights gender,

motherhood, and the post-secularization rhetoric of traditionalist Japanese culture.

Table 2: Case studies

	Recognition	Differentiation	Intimacy	Pillarization
<i>Mizuko Kuyo</i>	guilt in search of absolution	“mothered” children vs. abandoned children	the worshipper and her <i>jizo</i>	unbundling and symbolic repackaging of certain motherhood activities
True Love Waits	teenager in Christian subculture	chastity vs. corruption	eroticized spiritual connections	unbundling of chastity from conventional doctrinal context
Central Slovak Jews	“something else and maybe something more”	Slovak and/or Jewish	interpersonal validation	community membership
New Song	identification as “broken people”	churched vs. unchurched	community solidarity	rebundling of “church” based on GenX reaction to megachurch model
Friday Night Live	search for connection	belonging vs. disaffiliation	belonging (and, to a lesser extent, human-divine intimacy)	unbundling of services from conventional synagogue model
Jewish emergent	search for meaning	authentic connection vs. inauthentic connection	community solidarity	rebundling of Jewish ritual and social activities based critique of synagogue model

The next four case studies cover the four conceptual sites for observing discourse and communicative action: differentiation, recognition, intimacy, and pillarization. Each of the case studies emphasizes at least one or two sites, ensuring illustrations across the range. Chapter Four, an exploration of the Southern Baptist True Love Waits campaign, demonstrates how a look at communication strategies can make visible the conceptual site of differentiation, which, as noted above, takes as a given the diversity of religious groups in a society and refers to the reflexive need to make group-versus-group distinctions that result from the existence of co-existent communities of divergent practice. The case uncovers the ways in which institutional élites produce religious meaning (however contested) by using ideological differentiation to connect and cohere the religious field. It does so by understanding

the True Love Waits campaign as a means of selling a complete identity, both individual and collective; considering the campaign as representative of popular American Protestantism; and reflecting on the campaign as a marketing strategy, one with targets, niches, and messages. The True Love Waits campaign is an attempt to market not culture, nor self-improvement and relaxation, but rather an entire way of being in the world (pillarization), and of indicating one's relationship to the world in which one lives (differentiation).

Chapter Five focuses on recognition—the “shared script” through which people actively define themselves through the articulation of a particular way of being in the world—through an ethnographic look at the way Slovak Jews contend with their Slovak and Jewish identities through communal solidarity and shared social practices. Doing so ethnographically in a Jewish context, however, especially one as secularized as postsocialist Slovakia, raises important issues related to the situational definition of religion as well as the positionality of the researcher. Unlike other case studies, in which religiousness has a transcendental or divine referent, in this particular situation, the content of “Jewishness” at first seems primarily secular: communal solidarity and shared social practices. This not only undermines sharp distinctions between the religious and the secular but also challenges the observer to attend carefully to the implications of his or her own interpretations, lest they reify a conceptual separation that may not be experienced in lived conditions. Indeed, a review of Jewish studies literature finds that much of it reflects normative scholarly preferences for “strong” Jews rather than “weak” Jews, that is, Jews who are actively

engaged in the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of their individual and collective identities as Jews, rather than Jews who, beyond even passive engagement, may be ambivalent about or ignorant of those identities. Counter-trends to this tendency are visible primarily in anthropological studies of Judaism and in theoretical and methodological reflections on issues of ethnographic access, the relationship between method and findings, and problems related to the interaction between the researcher and the field. To that end, the application of a Jewish setting raises questions about anthropological theories and assumptions and in which the use of ethnographic methods provides new insights into interstitial Judaism itself. This particular case of the Jews of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, documents how recognition is expressed through coded language (*unser einer*—German for “one of us”), through common coming-of-age stories about learning of their heritage as teenagers, through struggling with whether or not they consider themselves to be Jews. Indeed, as I note, core to this case study is the negotiation not only over the nature of identity but of the very authority to self-define. However, the fieldwork also raised significant issues related to my position as a researcher (among other identity markers, one of Slovak Jewish origin), issues not directly addressed in this chapter but taken up in Chapter Eight.

Returning to California, Chapters Six and Seven are rooted in the “seeker” turn in American religion, a phenomenon born under high secularization and discussed somewhat in Chapter Two but at greater length here. **Chapter Six** argues that contrary to the interpretations generated through variations on secularization

theory, seeker services are sites at which religious forms are taken out of their “traditional” contexts and subsequently redeployed in a new guise privileging cultural affiliation over communal membership and the emotional over the ethical. The voluntaristic ego-centered social network replaces the membership-based community institution; and spiritual “experiences” are preferred to cognitive religious behaviors. This highlights the conceptual site of intimacy, where the interpersonal, relational dynamic is the organizing principle for collective action, reveals both the influence of secularization theory on understandings of contemporary congregational innovation and the limitations. The chapter briefly reviews Willow Creek, one of the earliest and most influential seeker churches, in the context of secularization theory but then turns to a lengthier field-based study of a “Generation X church.” The chapter’s title, “broken people trying to have church,” reflects well both the contingency and the aspiration of their effort to find a sense of belonging together. The case study of New Song Church documents the creation of identities and social forms whose value lies in the extent to which they help the subject find intimacy by recreating an environment (in the sense of a life-world or *habitus*) within which he/she can cope and ideally feel comfortable, “at home.”

Building on this approach to studying religion in congregational settings, in Chapter Seven, I attend both to intimacy and to pillarization, which refers to the “bundling” (or, frequently re-bundling) of religious collectivities to provide a coherent strategy for living. This chapter is a challenge to secularization theory’s imagination of the social specialization of religion, the restriction of “the religious” to

limited aspects of individual and collective experience and further makes the case for studying religious congregations without privileging them as institutions—indeed by moving unaffiliated Jews from the periphery to the center of the comparative enterprise. In the case studies at issue, I translate the seeker and post-seeker paradigms out of Christianity and into American Judaism, first with a look at a Jewish seeker service in Los Angeles and then with an overview of a new “Jewish emergent” reinvention of the congregational model. I attend to the new institutional formations that are emerging even as I write these words. The ideologies at stake at Friday Night Live and among Jewish emergent communities (and in many respects, those of the megachurches) reject the demarcations between the sacred and the secular. Following a discussion of the characteristics and implications of a post-secularized understanding of seeker religion, which returns to the question of intimacy, the chapter turns to the Jewish emergent phenomenon, which illustrates three large-scale transformations of identity and collectivity in twenty-first century Jewish life: (a) the unbundling and relocation of activities previously “packaged” in a given institution, such as the synagogue; (b) the shift in the organizing principle for collective action (as noted above) from the institutional framework to the interpersonal, relational dynamic; and (c) the bundling (and rebundling) of activities and practices into new institutions that reflect contemporary realities and meet the needs of the individuals they engage and serve.

That the observer is ineluctably embedded in the process of defining and representing the field is a challenge to which I return in Chapter Eight. The definition

of religion advanced in this dissertation includes the caveat that because of his or her active role in perceiving and interacting with and within the social networks that structure religious fields, the empirical scholar inherently and inevitably is a part of the field itself, which simply cannot exist without the relationship between the ethnographer and the object of study. To that end, in Chapter Eight, I revisit the field situations covered in Chapters Five and Six—Jews in Central Slovakia and Generation X evangelicals in Southern California—to consider the representational issues that arose in the design, implementation, and write-up of my ethnographic research. I note that there are at least eight different representational moments in the anthropological encounter, implicating the ethnographer her- or himself, ethnographic “Others” (i.e., those in the field under study), other scholars, and the general public. Calling attention to the way that we as scholars attempt to create knowledge about what is actually “out there,” I draw the conclusion that the field is also the anthropologist her- or himself, because it simply cannot exist without the relationship between the ethnographer and the object of study.

Before considering the case studies in full detail, however, Chapter Two argues that we can analyze the interstitial middle ground most effectively if we view religion as a field or network visible through the interaction of individuals and institutions within it. It does so in three steps. First, it brings a social anthropological (rather than purely sociological) reading to secularization theory in order to highlight the discontinuities between the macrosociological theory and the microsociological (or ethnographic) realities on the ground. Part of this involves considering and ruling

out, as an alternative, mapping approaches that attempt to categorize and classify religious phenomena rather than to explain them. Two of the most important are cohort analyses of individual religious orientations and organizational assessments of religious organizations (congregational studies); even they, however, are rooted in secularization theory. The second step is to juxtapose the individual and the institutional against one another. I do this illustratively by reading two foundational essays by Charles Taylor and R. Stephen Warner together, in order to connect a relational theory of the self and of identity formation with a research program to investigate a variety of religious structures—not simply institutions, but indeed networks and other “horizons of significance”—in what I argue is a post-secularized world. Having done that, my third step is to move beyond secularization theory to find new approaches grounded in current realities. Via a discussion of contemporary tropes in individual religious identity formation, I advance an approach that considers religion not as a social fact of stated belief or assumed belonging, but rather as a dynamic quality of action. As such, I find that religion is related intimately to social networks and social mobilization. To conclude the chapter, then, I propose to integrate social network approaches more fully into the study of religion. Doing so, I argue, prompts us to shift our view of the religious field, which becomes visible to the empirical observer through discourse and communicative action.

In the final chapter, I offer some concluding thoughts about the process of applying the extended case method and its implications for the power of the researcher to see and communicate his or her vision, alongside witnessed power

struggles that inhere in identity-definition in every setting, from the institutional to the interpersonal. I point to three important potential limitations in the approach advocated here—misrecognition, transgression, and unfalsifiability—and as a response, I offer some possible directions not only for responding to existing theoretical challenges but also for advancing future research. Finally, I call for bringing anthropology back as a core component of religious studies.

TWO. FROM SECULARIZATION TO SOCIAL NETWORKS

Secularization theory asserts, “religion is not what it once was” (McGuire, 2002, p. 285). Trends associated with secularization include disestablishment, institutional differentiation, societalization, privatization, decline in individual religious belief, and rationalization. Religion, in this narrative, refers to beliefs (that is, the truth of religious explanations) and practices (mostly related to worship attendance). Secularization involves increasing compartmentalization, differentiation, and autonomization; according to the theory, religion loses significance as an orienting paradigm for human experience in that it becomes both less “meaningful” and meaningful in fewer ways. If the most basic claim of secularization—as simplistic as it may sound, that religion is not what it once was—is true, then what is it we are studying? And yet identity in general and religious identity in particular is increasing reflective and intentional, and ever more often a matter of public and private turmoil.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a theoretical grounding for my claim that we can analyze the interstitial middle ground most effectively if we view religion as a field or network visible through the interaction of individuals and institutions within it. The argument has three parts. First, using social anthropological readings of secularization theory, I show that the macrosociological lens of secularizations does not help us see the microsociological (or ethnographic) realities on the ground. The second step is to reframe the argument by finding a way to see the interstitial middle ground; I do so by juxtaposing the individual and the institutional against one another

through a dual reading of foundational essays by Charles Taylor and R. Stephen Warner. This points the way toward networks and other “horizons of significance” that are visible to the scholar in a post-secularized world. Finally, I advance an approach taking religion not as a social fact of stated belief or assumed belonging, but rather as a dynamic quality of action, in order to move beyond secularization theory to find new approaches grounded in current realities. As social networks and social mobilization, therefore, are inherent in religion, I close the chapter with a call to integrate social network approaches more fully into the study of religion.

1. Secularization theory and its social anthropological critics

Interpreters of American religion long have framed the contemporary situation in terms of secularization theory, even if in opposition to it. Representative of this approach is the interpretation in *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, a textbook by historians Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, which advances the notion “religion in America ...usually stands with the grain of American secular history, not against it” (2003, p. x). Contrary to “the predictions of social scientists...that as any society modernizes and industrializes religion would be pushed to the margins,” they argue, “Americans clung stubbornly to faith” (p. 439). They repeat this formulation—“Americans clung stubbornly to religion and spirituality”—at the end of the chapter, asserting this was “the one constant...amid massive cultural changes...despite industrialization, modernization, even secularization” (p. 453).

Within and beyond North America, advocates of secularization theory tend to define religion almost exclusively in terms of its cognitive and propositional manifestations: religion as “ultimate concern” and as belief in specific (usually Christian) propositional statements. For example, Karel Dobbelaere’s review of the development of the secularization thesis (2002, pp. 146-152) shows how definitions of religiosity under secularization focused first on plausibility structures and subsequently on problems of meaning and “ultimate concern.” Both of these categories refer broadly to a cognitive bias, one in which attendance and affiliation are linked to religion’s ability to *explain* the world or to *answer* difficult questions. Even “non-doctrinal” and “non-institutional” religions were described in terms of their attention to “ultimate concern” (2002, pp. 153-154). As religion, or more specifically, religious institutions, lost their explanatory authority, the secularization thesis argues, personal religiosity (measured through attendance and affiliation) declined. Indeed, Dobbelaere finds that “secularization theory holds that pluralism undermines the taken-for-granted certainties of religion, which in turn promotes individual secularization” (2002, p. 194); “certainties” here is a synonym for “verities” (Berger, 2001, p. 194), that is, propositional truths.

Like secularization theory’s advocates, its critics also often conceptualize religion primarily in cognitive terms, “interactive with” but nonetheless at some remove from dimensions such as materiality, organization, and psychosocial identity (see, for example, Swatos & Christiano, pp. 224-225). This limited “ideational” field on which “religious structures of meaning” appear to operate is quite narrow. One of

secularization theory's harshest critics and a leading proponent of Rational Choice Theory, Rodney Stark, increasingly has advocated a definition of "religion" involving little more than cognitive belief in a monotheistic god who judges individuals for eternal salvation or damnation; Stark explicitly rejects ritual and practice as constitutive of religiosity (2004).

Social anthropological engagement with theories of secularization has been sporadic and generally critical, primarily because of inconsistencies between secularization theories and local ethnographic realities. It is only in the past 10 years that social anthropologists have devoted more than passing attention to it. As Simon Coleman observes in a disciplinary newsletter—suggesting the conventional wisdom:

despite the popularity of the secularization thesis, grassroots evidence—especially that provided by anthropologists—has always tended to suggest a much more complex picture of what might be meant by religious belief, practice and the apparent loss of faith. (2006, p. 57; see also Hefner, 1998, pp. 97-98)

For anthropologists such as Coleman, the basic problem with the thesis is its inapplicability on the local level, where the ethnographic approach, with its different methods of data analysis, is more likely to privilege the "everyday and domestic" (Coleman & Collins, 2004, p. 11). Robert Hefner, for instance, argues for an "embedded and pluralistic understanding of religious change in the West" (1998, p. 89) and notes that religiosity is "not a reaction against but a response to the modern world" (p. 97). Similarly, Mayfair Yang observes of the Chinese context (emphasis

hers) that “secularization was *not* a gradual *effect* of economic or technological changes, but a conscious, active and eagerly pursued nationalist project” (Yang, 2011, p. 20).¹⁴ Jean-Paul Baldacchino and Joel S. Kahn point out the continuing sociological focus on religion’s institutional retreat from the public sphere and the decline in belief and practice, to the exclusion of other explorations of secularization and the secular (Baldacchino & Kahn, 2011, pp. 2-3). Reviewing a body of anthropological literature with a historian’s eye, Richard J. Callahan observes:

the long-held distinction between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ is not only dissolving in post-modern or post-post-modern (sometimes called ‘post-secular’) times, but its dissolution also calls forth the power to see that perhaps the distinction was never quite firm. (Callahan, 2012, p. 431)

For many anthropologists, the idea of secularization necessarily implies a particular approach to defining religion, which may or may not be sustained in the field (see, for example, João de Pina-Cabral, 2001, p. 329). James Holston (2000) argues against lining up secularization and modernity against sacralization and pre-modernity. Similarly, in their introduction to a reader on the anthropology of religion, Stephen Glazier and Charles Flowerday criticize the implicit binary opposition between the “religious” and the “secular” (2003, pp. 3-4). Fenella Cannell goes so far as to suggest that “the idea of Christianity as a universally and essentially ascetic and other-worldly religion [has] embedded itself, unrecognized, in aspects of

¹⁴ It is fruitful to juxtapose Yang’s (2011) argument with Turner’s (2012) distinction between political and social secularizations. In the Chinese case, it seems, political secularization succeeded but social secularization has not occurred in the same way. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, the phenomenon of *mizuko kuyo* similarly reflects the contestation of social secularization in the wake of postwar political secularization in Japan.

anthropological theory itself,” with asceticism defined as “the inferiority and sinfulness of the body compared to the soul” (2005, p. 340, p. 341). “The assumption,” she writes, is that “with capitalism ascetic Protestantism will become the dominant form of Christianity and that Protestantism itself will inevitably produce secularism” (2005, p. 348). She proposes, instead:

to allow anthropology to stop ruling out of court seemingly heterodox Christianities—Christianities which fail to supply such apparent essentials as a radical separation between body and spirit, between this life and the life to come, or between spirituality and kinship. We might instead come to see these not just as local “resistance”, or as peripheral parts of “real Christianity”, but as alternative Christianities deeply rooted in the highly unstable syntheses which Christian orthodoxies themselves represent. Anthropology is a discipline that is not always so “secular” as it likes to think. (2005, p. 352)

To be sure, some anthropologists have deployed variations of the secularization thesis in their work without difficulty, but even then, they insist it cannot apply everywhere (see, for example, Cesari, 2005). James Dow (2005, p. 838) rejects secularization as too general; going further, Clifford Geertz (2005) charges the secularization thesis is “reductionist” and “out-of-step” (10) and suggests, instead, what has happened is:

(1) the progressive disentanglement, for want of a better word, of the major religions (and some of the minor ones—Soka Gakkai, Mormonism, Cao Dai, Baha’i) from the places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which they were historically formed: Hinduism and Buddhism from the deep particularities of Southern and Eastern Asia, Christianity from those of Europe and the United States, Islam from those of the New East and North Africa; and (2) the emergence of religious persuasion, inherited or self-ascribed, thinned-out or reinforced, as a broadly negotiable, mobile and fungible, instrument of public identity. (Geertz, 2005, pp. 10-11)

Perhaps the clearest synthesis of the social anthropological critique of

secularization theory is that of Chris Hann, who notes different local experiences may yield different theoretical outcomes (2000, p. 15). Hann's critique of sociological approaches comes through identifying three specific social anthropological contributions to theories of secularization: first, through compensation for sociology's Western bias; second, attention through ethnographic study of local variations and instantiations of religious change; and third, through challenging the assumption that "secular" civil society depends on market-based economic models and individualist understandings of human rights (Hann, 2000, pp. 14-15).

Mapping theories

An alternative way of looking at contemporary religious expressions attempts less to explain the phenomena than to categorize and classify them. The purpose of "mapping," as it is called, is to identify the general characteristics of the terrain of religion. At times, this involves identifying individual religious orientations and specific denominational or congregational outlooks, at other times identifying epiphenomena that are characteristic of the given situation—for example, typically American. For example, in her introduction to her reader in *American Religious History* (2002), Amanda Porterfield highlights how the "overall strength and vitality [of American religions] depend on some basic elements...common to American religious life as a whole" (Porterfield, 2002, p. 1). She identifies these as the perseverance of the Puritan errand to tame the wilderness, commitments to and contests over religious freedom, fascination with individual religious experience, and

the religious foundations of family organization and social reform.

Other scholars also have categorized and classified religious movements. For example, a collection entitled *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society* (Mittleman, Sarna, & Licht, 2002) is organized in part by Jewish denominational streams (Reform, Conservative, orthodox, ultraorthodox, Reconstructionist, and renewal) rather than by political philosophies (liberal, moderate, conservative) or political parties (Democrat, Republican). The volume's contribution is unique in its classification of ultraorthodox Judaism and "renewal" Judaism as units for assessment and analysis, which by extension is an argument that the map of American Judaism should be refined to include them alongside groups that are more familiar.

As Martin Marty has observed (1988, pp. 14-15), contemporary "mapping" attends not only to boundaries but also to the characteristics of the terrain. That is, it considers not only the distinctions between religious groups and organizations but also individual traits and orientations that may cut across denominational boundaries. The maps that result from scholarly observation often are very different from those put out by adherents themselves. Marty's own maps of American religion have shifted significantly, from a six-element map of religious group orientations in 1976—"mainline, evangelicalism and fundamentalism, Pentecostal-charismatic, the new religions, ethnic religion, and civil religion"—to a three-element map in 1988 reflecting individual religious stances—"individualized, invisible, protean, postmodern religion" alongside fundamentalist tribal exclusive religion and a third, more moderate, "seeker" effort to "pursue integral and organic outlooks and ways of

life through... a return to sources” (1988, pp. 18-19, 26). This reorientation, from collective characteristics to individual ones, has been particularly important in the effort to map the religion of American Baby Boomers (i.e., those born between 1946 and 1964).

Two mapping efforts are of particular relevance to us here. First, there are those who seek to categorize individual religious orientations. The studies of the Baby Boom generation that emerged during the mid-1990s have produced remarkably similar results. Wade Clark Roof’s portrait of the Baby Boom generation as a whole revealed people of all faiths who “value experience over beliefs, distrust institutions and leaders, stress personal fulfillment yet yearn for community, and are fluid in their allegiances” (Roof, 1993, p. 9). One study found that, influenced by education, pluralism, individualism, and privatism, Protestant Baby Boomers sought religious education for their children, “personal support and reassurance” for themselves, connection to a community, and “inspiration and spiritual guidance” (Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993, p. 201; pp. 204-205). In his study of Jewish Baby Boomers based on the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, Chaim I. Waxman found increased interest in spirituality and lower levels of commitment to organized religion to be the result of trends toward individualism, postmaterialism, and privatization (2001, p. 127, pp. 142-143). In another study of American Jews, Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen state simply, “the principal authority for contemporary American Jews, in the absence of compelling religious norms and communal loyalties, has become the sovereign self” (2001, p. 2).

The second type of mapping is an assessment of religious organizations. Under the rubric of congregational studies, this approach treats the individual religious organization as the unit of analysis or as the framework within which to describe American religion. Some studies focus on one congregation in particular as emblematic of broader trends; thus, R. Stephen Warner considered the experience of one Presbyterian church in Mendocino, California, to be a “mirror” of the history of Protestantism from the 1950s through the 1980s (Warner, 1988, p. xi). Other studies take detailed congregational snapshots in the hope of learning something about the contemporary situation; Nancy Ammerman argued that Southside Gospel Churches “identity and way of life place it squarely in the midst of the larger Fundamentalist movement” (Ammerman, 1987, p. 14). Studies involving multiple congregations stress the congregation is the “dominant form of religious gathering in American society” (Carroll & Roof, 2002, p. 9) and because “gathering religiously” is an expression of group identity, congregations are ideal sites for studying lived religion, that is, religious practice rather than religious doctrine (Warner, 1998, p. 3, pp. 8-9). Ultimately, congregation-based studies offer the chance to understand how religious Americans live and practice their faith (see, for example, Prell, 2000; Wind & Lewis, 1994).

Where cohort analysis or congregational studies each finds itself limited, the other offers a complementary approach. Cohort analyses take a broad view and, thus, may not provide detail sufficient to understand those attending or otherwise involved in religious groups. However, congregational studies by nature focus on members,

rather than attenders, and therefore, cannot necessarily account for seekers who come and go or stay on the sidelines. Moreover, until relatively recently, congregational studies have not paid much attention to ritual and liturgy (cf. Chaves, 1999; Chaves, 2004), when it is through religious services that first-time attenders most frequently come to know a congregation—and cohort studies cannot predict who is likely to be a first-time attender.

2. Intersecting the institutional and the individual

In many respects, all of these attempts to categorize and classify contemporary religious phenomena are based on the underlying assumptions of secularization theory. Even a “return”¹⁵ to religion and spirituality can be explained via secularization theory: in *Seeker Churches*, Kimon Sargeant proposes a recasting of secularization theory itself —under the rubric of “neosecularization theory” — such that the term itself “refers to the transformation, not the decline, of religion” (2000, p. 176). Neosecularization theory’s “primary concern” is the “shifting locus of religious authority [away from] religious institutions and toward selective appropriation of religious traditions based on individual needs” (2000, p. 177)—an apt description of contemporary, especially Baby Boomer, religiosity. If religious identity and religious organizations are disembedded and autonomous, it follows that individuals would be susceptible to “religious marketing techniques” that either

¹⁵ Meredith McGuire wonders: “is the mysticism or the popular religiosity of ...late modern movements qualitatively different from those in late medieval or early modern times? My hunch is that earlier patterns of spirituality...were far more holistic, eclectic, and this-worldly than we have believed” (McGuire, 2008, p. 228).

explicitly endorsed or rejected these basic premises. In other words, successful religious groups would be those that either (a) treated religious seekers as consumers in a marketplace of ideas or (b) denounced “relativism” and presented a clear path to absolute religious certainty. Indeed, we find this largely is the case.

At a very basic level, the excellent, richly descriptive and provocatively categorized research does not help us understand why the current religious scene looks the way it does. The success of secularization theory assures us if we go looking for religious consumerism, we will find it, and if we go looking for anti-secular fundamentalism, we will find it as well. This is largely the point of Woodhead, Heelas, and Davie’s introduction to *Predicting Religion* (2003): “the most common way in which questions about the future of religion are posed is in terms of the polarity between religion and secularity” (2003, p. 3). To that end, José Casanova argues in the same volume “theories of secularization in Europe have functioned as self-fulfilling prophecies to the extent that a majority of the population in Europe has come to accept the premises of those theories as a depiction of the normal state of affairs and as a projection of future developments” (2003, p. 24). Structurally at least, the same might be said of the American situation—whether one explicitly accepts or rejects the premises of those theories, one still is thinking in terms of those parameters.

One way to test the probative value of the parameters of the conventional secularization discussion is to attempt to surface what might otherwise appear to be unstated assumptions. By juxtaposing the work of Charles Taylor and R. Stephen

Warner, I intend to map a path through the thicket of debates over “secularization theory” and “new paradigms,” debates that have repeatedly debunked “institutions” only to recreate them in new forms.

Why Taylor and Warner? Taken in counterpoint, they explicate the discursive, dialogical nature of identity formation by individuals and within communities while treating religion as “a fundamental category of identity and association, capable of grounding both solidarities and identities” (Warner 1993, p. 1059). Although Taylor today is best known for *A Secular Age* (2007),¹⁶ which has prompted substantial discussion among sociologists of religion about the meaning of secularity and the relationship between religion and the secular (see, among others, Baldacchino & Kahn, 2011; Bender & Taves, 2012; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011; cf. Cannell, 2010; Gorski, Kim, Torpey, & VanAntwerpen, 2012), I wish to focus here on his foundational work, especially that rooted in *The ethics of authenticity* (1992) and *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (1994). Among Taylor’s many contributions to the sociology of religion is to provide

¹⁶ Taylor has earned international acclaim for his work on the problems of identity and community, particularly as those problems relate to politics and society; arguably some of his most important contributions to the contemporary sociology of religion can be found in his development of what he terms “philosophical anthropology.” The foundations of Taylor’s philosophical anthropology have been outlined in a wide-ranging array of influential essays, including those contained in *Philosophy and the human sciences* (1985), *The ethics of authenticity* (1992), *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (1992), *Reconciling the solitudes* (1994), and his compilation of nearly thirty years of writings about Quebecois nationalism and Canada’s constitutional crises, *Philosophical arguments* (1995), *Varieties of Religion Today* (2003a), and *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2003b). His essay, “The dangers of soft despotism,” (1993) for example, suggests new ways of understanding how the New Christian Right is simultaneously radically decentralized and yet politically powerful on a nationwide scale.

a basis for new descriptive methods that can: a) account for a web of inter-related motivations by explaining individual and group choices, b) describe the complexity and diversity underlying such motivations and choices, and c) explore the ways in which individuals and religious groups are recognized (or not recognized) by one another as having both a valid existence within society and a legitimate value structure.

Taylor's argument is that the contemporary debate over multiculturalism and what he terms "the politics of recognition" may be explained as the result of the historical transition in the modern West from "honor" to "dignity," and subsequently to "identity" and "authenticity." The shift from honor, which depends for its meaning and structure on its unequal distribution across society, to dignity, which presumes equal worth for all individuals, Taylor argues, has led to a "displacement of the moral accent," from the notion that self-fulfillment is a means to achieving "right" and "good" aims to the notion that self-fulfillment is a "right" and "good" aim in and of itself. "Authenticity," the "ideal...of being true to myself and my own particular way of being," thus, becomes an independent value. By extension, any notion of "responsibility" is inner-directed—one is responsible to oneself before anyone else: "not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can't even find the model to live by outside myself. I can find it only within" (Taylor, 1992, p. 29).¹⁷

¹⁷ Taylor, C. (1992). *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. It should be noted Taylor is quite skeptical of "authenticity" as he defines it here and in

As a way to parse some of the dilemmas in the contemporary sociology of religion, I want to juxtapose Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" alongside Warner's "Work in progress toward a new paradigm for the sociological study of religion in the United States." On the one hand, Taylor's arguments lead to an insightful critique of the current state of affairs in the sociology of religion and to a useful philosophical underpinning for the methods described in Warner's essay. On the other hand, the sociological data described by Warner (and by the sources Warner cites), as well as his inductive model of pluralism, suggest critical challenges and potential extensions for Taylor's conceptual model. Their arguments appear to parallel one another, insofar as the shift toward diversity of identity—in Taylor, the turn toward dignity and different paths to individual self-fulfillment; in Warner, the post-1776 emergence of an open market in American religion—is said to lead to a complicated politics of intergroup relations such that groups within society assert their identities in cooperation with and in competition with other groups and with society as a whole (see also Finke & Stark, 1992, Finke & Stark, 1998). There is a second important parallel between these arguments, namely the cause-and-effect claim that "authenticity" and empowerment lead to a politics of difference, whether politico-cultural difference (Taylor), or religious difference (Warner).

Taylor makes an interesting argument for what sociologists of religion might call a "supply-side" theory of culture: in a pluralistic world, give an initial value to a

Philosophical Arguments. Insofar as I identify this notion of authenticity with Taylor, it should not be read as implying his normative endorsement of it.

culture making a claim for recognition—if it “proves” itself, it will succeed in its objectives, if not, then it will assimilate or find other avenues of expression within existing groups. However, I want to raise three points of contention with his argument, and with the evidence he uses to support the argument, as I shall attempt to show later, R. Stephen Warner’s “new paradigm” evidence and argument suggest some ways of moving beyond these difficulties.

First, Taylor’s explanatory argument for the politics of recognition seems an excellent description of how pluralism came to be valued in the West, but it renders societal pluralism as almost an outgrowth, or offshoot, of particular trends in intellectual history. In other words, he does not address the social fact of pluralism, and the effects of pluralism on the politics of recognition. To a certain extent, this may be the inevitable result of his choice of evidence, however minimal. From its outset, Canadian society has comprised three distinct cultures: English, French, and aboriginal; two of these cultures (the English and the French) have long been acknowledged to have an extended tradition with which to justify their continued survival, while the third, that of aboriginal bands, has only recently been able to convince the public that it is in a similar position. By contrast, while the United States has been pluralistic from its outset, it has become progressively more plural in its makeup, and many of the groups claiming recognition rights (especially new immigrant groups) do not make their argument from history; those that do make arguments from history have often had to “recover” that history and to convince a skeptical public. Thus, the argument that the emergence of the politics of equal

dignity has led to the politics of recognition is accurate only in the narrowest sense: it is quite likely that the social fact of pluralism has given the case for equal dignity an impetus it would not otherwise have had.

My second disagreement with Taylor follows from the first. Given the limitations of his evidence—primarily the Canadian cultural crises, which concern questions of cultural privileges, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which concerned not group privileges but equal individual rights—it is perhaps not surprising that the only groups he describes as seeking recognition are those organized around race, ethnicity, or culture. His argument does not address questions of recognition for women, for those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex, or even for the disabled. On the one hand, he describes identity as “negotiat[ed] ..through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others,” and as “inwardly generated”; from this it might follow that identity is achieved, not ascribed, and therefore that societies ought to have mechanisms for recognizing individual and collective identities yet to be created. On the other hand, Taylor concludes that “it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning...over a long period of time...are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect”; by this logic, societies are obligated only to acknowledge those groups that have existed over some “long” historical period. Taylor’s explanatory model, thus, explains how identities come to be formed—presumably, individuals and groups have “negotiated” and “inwardly generated” conceptions of a woman’s identity, a gay or lesbian identity, a motorcycle user’s identity, a

Vietnamese-American identity, and a born-again Christian identity; nonetheless, Taylor fails to include these types of identities in his prescriptive model for recognition in society, and none of them are age-old cultures per se.

Third, regardless of whether or not these identities are the result of the social pressure of pluralism, and regardless of whether or not these are ascribed or achieved identities, it remains to be seen whether there is a difference between authenticity that is achieved within society and authenticity that is achieved in dissent against society. While the Québécois sovereignty movement has sought to preserve French-Canadian culture within Canadian society, many movements in the U.S., both on the “left” (the Afrocentrism of Louis Farrakhan) and on the “right” (the Christian Identity movement and the militia movement), have consciously rebelled against the establishment, and have sought to articulate identities incommensurable with the established social order. Furthermore, collective identities organized around religious movements—in particular, those associated with the Evangelical Christian subculture—occupy an ambivalent position between wanting to change the society in order to live within it and wanting to withdraw from what they see as an “irregenerate” and inevitably damned society. Taylor’s model does not adequately account for the development of such forms of “authenticity.”

In order to begin to address each of these three weaknesses in Taylor’s argument—pluralism as cause, rather than effect; the formation of new identities; and identity against society versus identity within society—it is perhaps useful to turn to Warner’s essay. He argues that the persistence of religiosity in the United States is

not adequately explained by the so-called “old paradigm,” which includes the secularization thesis, but is better explained by the “new paradigm,” which ascribes religious success to the open market system. In support of this argument, Warner employs census and organizational membership data supporting both paradigms, as well as statistical data, which (he claims) is better explained by the “new” paradigm; bibliographic data characterizing, for example, the “economic imagery” used by American religion scholars; demographic data (e.g., by region, by social class, or by level of urbanization); sociological and ethnographic secondary-source arguments, which (he claims) better fit into the new paradigm than into the old one; and anecdotal examples of organizational innovation, such as that of Troy Perry’s Metropolitan Community Church, for example, which serves gays and lesbians.

Warner describes “the alternation of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies” among religious institutional structures, and suggests that “de facto congregationalism” is one means by which small religious groups articulate an identity as against the larger group and society. This leads Warner to a discussion of the power of religious commitment as a force for social change—in particular, the extent to which religious institutions provide a collective identity over and against that of society, and sometimes in direct conflict with the establishment. Unlike Taylor, however, Warner proposes that sociologists test empirically for a link between religious authenticity and political action: “the analyst must in each case elucidate the mechanisms by which supernatural religion facilitates social strength[;] experience teaches us to look for such a link” (Warner, 1993, p. 1070).

To be sure, Warner's discussion of what he calls the "'new' voluntarism" in many respects parallels Taylor's discussion of the "new" demand for recognition. However, just as a new paradigm historian might suggest that there is, in fact, nothing new about the demands for recognition, an intellectual historian like Taylor could counter that there is nothing new in Warner's new voluntarism. If Taylor's focus on identity leads him to ignore the social fact of pluralism, then Warner's emphasis on pluralism comes at the expense of any cogent theory of identity. Warner's call for more research makes no mention of the need for further empirical inquiries into the effects of pluralism on religious identity formation, nor of the need for further ethnographic study of the ways in which religious group members (both lifelong participants and converts) come to terms with their sense of being and acting in society and in their groups.

At best, Warner endorses a rational choice view of the individual, one that assumes that all things being identical, identical inputs into identical individuals will yield identical outputs and identical choices. However, as Taylor effectively argues, nothing is ever identical—and therefore, while rational choice may be a useful heuristic device for modeling institutional behavior and positing potential decision-trees and behavioral outcomes, it is not a useful explanatory tool when it comes to individual human choices. The evidence that Warner gathers to make his new paradigm argument has a great deal to offer to the study of other models of identity formation and individual choice; however, Warner appears to have been far more concerned with presenting a tour-de-force interpretation of institutionalism. If there is

one lesson to be learned from the shortcomings (at least in the United States) of the secularization thesis, it is that institutional paradigms do not govern institutional behavior; individuals do.

All of this is to suggest that Warner's new paradigm may be neither new nor a paradigm at all. As Taylor's discussion demonstrates, the politics of difference have deep roots and a long history; to suggest that it is headline news simply because sociologists have only recently figured out how to operationalize such difficult variables is to admit to wearing the kind of disciplinary blinders that Warner rightly rejects. Furthermore, just as philosophers do not consider their debates over liberalism and communitarianism, debates to which Taylor alludes, but does not explicitly address here, to be Kuhnsian questions of paradigm, nor should sociologists of religion turn the secularization-versus-constitutive pluralism debate into anything other than a conversation over the normative description of society.

Where, then, does this leave us? While Warner proposes new directions for sociological theory in the study of religion, and new objects of study, it is Taylor's discussion of the politics of recognition that offers an important philosophical underpinning to the empirical tasks that Warner has set out for the field. By positing a relational theory of the self and of identity formation, Taylor has made it possible for sociologists with Warner's turn of mind to investigate a variety of religious structures—not simply institutions, but indeed networks and other “horizons of significance”—in what I will argue below is a post-secularized world.

Where do we go from here?

One response to secularization theory is to assert that it is wrong—or, more specifically, to disagree with the premise “modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the mind of individuals” (Berger, 1999, p. 2). In his desecularization thesis, Berger argues “experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism...have widely succeeded” (1999, p. 4).

There are two main problems with Berger’s theory. First, the very terms “desecularization” and “counter-secularization” imply a kind of linear reversal; that is, they imply either-or (or at the very least, more-or-less) movement between the binary poles of the religious and the secular. Second, the religious phenomena he claims are evidence of desecularization are themselves dependent on secularization for their identity—as Berger admits, they “reflect the presence of secularizing forces” (1999, p. 7). In rejecting the substance of the secularization thesis, therefore, Berger holds on to the logic of the secularization paradigm: the uncoupling and recoupling of religion and state, the emergence and subsumption of the individual.

In disagreeing with Berger’s desecularization thesis, Bruce rightly objects to what he takes to be Berger’s assertion that the refusal by religious institutions to adapt to secularization has anything to do with secularization as a whole (Bruce, 2001). Indeed, Berger concedes such a refusal may be a reaction to secularizing forces (Berger, 1999, p. 7). However, Bruce goes on to insist, “secularization of a certain type and extent is *irreversible* because the conditions required to construct, sustain,

and reproduce across generations a shared supernatural world-view are destroyed by individualism and pluralism” (Bruce, 2001, p. 100). In this, he is wrong, because individualism and pluralism do not necessary destroy religious belief; as Berger notes, while religious pluralism does undermine religious certainties, it does not render them untenable. Thus, “pluralism affects the *how* of religious belief, but not necessarily the *what*” (Berger, 2001, p. 194).

Secularization theorists such as Bruce would have us believe secularization is a linear process that continues *ad infinitum*. Berger argues for desecularization, a process of counter-secularization that sounds suspiciously like unscrambling eggs “the critique of secularity common to all the resurgent movements,” he writes, “is that human existence bereft of transcendence is an impoverished and finally untenable condition” (Berger, 1999, p. 13).

In the current religious climate, then, supporting or opposing existing versions of secularization theory really does not get us anywhere. Beyond the simple methodological reason that we cannot agree about what we are even arguing about, there are three main substantive reasons. First, at the macro level, the functional differentiation of religion is largely complete. Although there are relatively few “facts on the ground” in the non-Western world, nonetheless the concepts have embedded themselves elsewhere than just Europe and North America. If we want to look at religion at the societal level, we are limited largely to examining it as a motivating factor for global actors (i.e. Bush vs. Bin Laden as crusader vs. *jihadi*). Second, at the meso level, disestablishment and church-sect theory effectively explain the decline of

formerly hegemonic religious organizations and the proliferation of new groups.

Third, at the micro level, once we refocus our lens using a more comprehensive view of religion, we see that in general, individual religiosity has not increased or declined—it simply has changed. To revisit McGuire’s formulation, religion isn’t what it once was.

What we need, therefore, is a new approach that can account for the current situation, tell a story that resembles our own, and perhaps even hint at where religion and society are headed in the medium to long term. Setting aside for a moment our fear of meta-theories and meta-narratives, is there an alternative course through the middle ground?

Such a course would need to begin from the premise that the processes described by secularization theory either largely have run their course or are well enough underway that they can be taken as a given rather than viewed in imagined reaction to a prior “pre-secularization” steady state (again, bearing in mind the caveat that while this is a global approach, it is limited in scope to advanced industrialized societies; *pace* Norris & Inglehart, 2004, 2011). It also would need to account for new underlying social trends beginning to emerge in the wake of secularization. At the outset, it may be helpful to describe these new trends as they relate to theories of secularization.

In his contribution to *The Desecularization of the World*, Jonathan Sacks describes a revitalized Orthodox Judaism that seems to be characterized by many of the main features of pluralization:

I see a new generation of Jews emerging.... They are searching for personal meaning, moral guidance, and stability and structure in their lives. They have been touched by the outreach movements, and they are beginning to reconnect with Jewish observance and Talmud Torah, the study of Jewish texts.

This new generation, though personally committed to Orthodoxy, is far less interested in waging war with Reform.... It has moved beyond the vicarious sources of Jewish identity—anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and support for Israel—toward a genuine personal encounter with the elements of Judaism that made it a source of inspiration for a hundred generations. Prominent among these are its love of family, community, education, and philanthropy, and its way of translating abstract ideals into simple daily practices ...the choreography of kedushah, the distinct Jewish pattern of acts and observances that lead to a life of holiness. (Sacks, 1999, p. 61)

The self-interest of individual religious consumerism has changed somewhat, according to Sacks, into a form of in-group self-interest. What he terms the genuine personal encounter is with communally interactive concepts: moral guidance, [social] structure, observance, family, community, education, philanthropy, and simple daily practices that in the Jewish tradition are most meaningful when performed with or alongside others.

To understand these shifts, we obviously must acknowledge the individual religious consumer's freedom to choose the extent to which he or she wishes to participate in religious activities. However, we also must move beyond categories such as attendance or membership to explore the nature of the connection or affiliation. This brings to the foreground issues such as the importance of the connection in the attendee's broader sense of self, shifting boundaries of group identity, and the relative centrality or peripherality of various aspects of the

relationship between the individual and the seeker organization, especially in terms of the ritual experience, theological suppositions, and any behavioral expectations (see D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, Meyer, & Friend, 2001, pp. 34-50).

In contrast to the polarity of secularization and counter-secularization, I want to argue the processes implicit in the secularization model have run their course.¹⁸ At the societal level, religious authority has had its jurisdiction reduced and its spheres of influence circumscribed. However, within those areas in which religion retains authority, it has acquired even greater power and control. At the organizational level, new and sectarian religious groups have proliferated even as establishment churches lose their grip on physical and social capital. At the individual level, people continue to imbue their life narratives and life choices with what they understand as the sacred, whether that is expressed religiously or spiritually.

The failure of modernity partially explains the end of secularization. Although an important implication of secularization is the shift of meaning-making authority from external structures to internal ones, along the way any number of meaning systems, from communism to totalitarianism to the New Age, emerged to claim the allegiance of those who had abandoned traditional religious commitments. None of these meaning systems was more seductive than the project of modernity itself, which promised rationalization, systematization, and, ultimately, order. In the end, if

¹⁸ Davie (2013, pp. xvi-xix) cautions against treating secularization and counter-secularization or sacralization as unitary and notes that the religious-secular dynamic is an ongoing one; my point is that the *model* of secularization theory no longer adds much new value.

modernity successfully dislodged religion from its exclusive claim to answering the question, “What is Truth?” modernity could not answer its twin, “How should I live?”

Indeed, the similarity in comments by a diverse range of theologians who link the end of authority with the end of secularization is striking. Rabbi Arthur Green writes of the completion of secularization, the fact of the global village, and the failure of modernity. The soul, he claims, “does not natively speak any spiritual language.” He “reject[s] modernity as a source of values” because it has failed:

To provide meaning structures to guide [us through the maze of interpersonal complexities..., to inspire us collectively to do something to keep the physical world alive and nourishing of life, or that will lead [us] to an encounter with Truth on a deeper level. (Green, 1995, pp. 4-8)

“Post-Christian” Don Cupitt asserts because “orthodoxy, essences, and authority are dead,” notions such as departure from tradition or breaking the rules are “utterly meaningless” and necessitate a “fresh start” (Cupitt, 1998, p. 220). The evangelist Robert Schuller told interviewers, “When I started, many non-churched persons were conditioned by a culture dominated by Judeo-Christian values. Their collective memory systems were still receptive to a message from the Judeo-Christian value system. That’s no longer true” (Miller & Goetz, 1997, p. 115).

Put another way, secularization is not wrong; it is over. People turning to religion to answer their questions about how to live approach their faith from a perspective marked by secularization and individualization. Different scholars express this in different ways: Jackson Carroll and Wade Clark Roof treat religious pluralism, privatized religion, and post-traditional society as the givens in their study of religion and generations (Carroll & Roof, 2002, pp. 39-56); Alan Wolfe points to

religious toleration, personalized faith, distrust of leadership, sociocultural assimilation, and the explosion of religious “nones,” that is, people who identify with no religion (Wolfe, 2003, p. 249). Charles Taylor identifies the emergence of “expressive individualism,” the post-war “consumer revolution,” and the “culture of authenticity,” all of which have led to a “pluralist, fractured culture” in which “the spiritual as such is no longer intrinsically related to society” (Taylor, 2002, pp. 80-107). In each of these cases, the phenomenon is not emerging, but indeed fully emerged.¹⁹

¹⁹ Left somewhat unaddressed here is the question of personhood itself, beyond identity construction. Among the many analytical schema available, two are particularly salient to the discussion here: one that addresses the person as subject and object of cognition—thought experience—and another that considers the embodied person—lived experience. The first, cognitive, typology is Grace Harris’s differentiation between individual, self and person (Harris, 1989). The term “individual,” she proposes, refers to the “human being considered as a single member of the human kind” (Harris, 1989, p. 600). The term “self” involves “the human being as a locus of experience, including experience of that human’s someoneness” (p. 601). An anthropological focus on individuals would treat them “as members of aggregates of human organisms” and would “direct attention to society seen as a collectivity” (p. 608). An anthropological focus on selves would “formulate questions and ...direct observations with reference to posited intrapsychic structures and processes” (p. 608). Finally, the term ‘person’ would involve “conceptualizing the human or other being as an agent, the author of action purposively directed toward a goal” (p. 602). Thus, from the anthropological perspective, “to focus on persons as agents-in-society brings properties of the social order and its cultural forms to the center of attention” (p. 608). The limitation of this first approach, *pace* Turina, is that it requires empirical access inside the respondent’s head; this seems unrealistic and unnecessary for the issues under consideration here.

The second typology, more concerned with the physical person than with the idea of the person, is more relevant to the world after secularization. It comes from the medical anthropology of Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987). They postulate three bodies: the “individual body,” understood in the phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self; the “social body,” referring to the representational uses of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture; and the ‘body politic’, referring to the regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference. These three bodies, the authors claim, represent “three

3. Networks in action

How then, to study the phenomenon of religion in a fragmented post-secularized society? One approach is to root the enterprise in the psychology of religion, as Taves does (see discussion in Chapter One, above). Taves's focus, however, appears to be on the process of identifying and defining as sacred (or "special")—"the larger class of things that people set apart (behaviorally) as special and, thus, to some degree 'singularize'" (2012, p. 234). To be sure, Taves always had acknowledged the extent to which they are discussed and contested in their social context. However, she had been less specifically concerned with the negotiation and recognition of certain "special things" as constitutive of particular religious identities. As a result, Taves "end[ed] up where some of the sociologists start...an indication of where we could build stronger bridges between psychology and sociology" (2010b, p. 320); this dissertation, like her work in progress, seeks to strengthen those bridges (and all the more so between sociology and social anthropology). A good example of the growing importance of this understanding of religion can be found in Wade Clark Roof's two major studies of American seekers, *A Generation of Seekers* (1993) and *Spiritual Marketplace* (1999). In the earlier work, Roof finds that religion, at least for Baby Boomers, involves "a greater concern for spiritual quest, for connectedness and

different theoretical approaches and epistemologies: phenomenology (individual body, the lived self), structuralism and symbolism (the social body), and poststructuralism (the body politic)" (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, pp. 7-8), which can be used to understand "why and how certain kinds of bodies are socially produced" (pp. 7-8). Both the social body and the body politic become real through discourse and language and thus manifest themselves in the same ways that religion itself does; they appear to be more fruitful metaphors on which to build the foundations of a religious identity articulated through social networks.

unity, and for a vision that encompasses body and spirit, the material as well as the immaterial” and therefore, understanding them requires not only “religion in some narrow sense,” but also a sense of “how their lives as a whole take on meaning and direction” (1993, p. 26). By *Spiritual Marketplace*, Roof links religion to “two main foci of concerns—personal meaning and social belonging” (1999, p. 7) and suggests it involves “symbol, belief, practice, experience, identity, community, [and] institution” (1999, p. 33). He explicitly defines “lived religion” as “religion as experienced in everyday life” (Roof, 1999, p. 41) and argues it “privileges the comprehensive religious expression of the actor” (Roof, 1999, p. 328n22) and provides for a fuller understanding of religious identity. Lived religion involves three main dimensions, Roof argues:

Scripts, or sets of symbols that imaginatively explain what the world and life are about; practices, or the means whereby individuals relate to, and locate themselves within, a symbolic frame of reference; and human agency, or the ability of people to actively engage the religious worlds they help to create. (p. 41)

As it becomes more difficult for observers to know where to follow scripts and practices as they move beyond the bounds of established organizations and beyond the reach of traditional authorities, it makes more sense to focus less on the stated theology of the organization and more on the language used both in the liturgy (whether sung or read) and in the spoken messages. Instead of identifying the appeal to a vaguely defined “sense of community,” research could highlight the emergence of, as well as the dynamics within, interpersonal and congregational connections and networks. This also helps to address the challenge of a mentality in which one

participates in a reality greater than oneself without necessarily having first evaluated the propositional “truth” of that reality—what I call “trying on.”²⁰

Such an approach considers religion not as a social fact, but rather as a quality of action. My intent is not to dismiss entirely the Durkheimian focus on the religious as something that emerges from social unity and collective effervescence—but rather to suggest religion is not so much an object produced, or a way of being, but rather a paradigm of action. Religion happens. Religion happens to people. People “do” religion insofar as they engage in activities that they deem to be religious, whether in process or in outcome. In this sense, therefore, as I have argued, religion is related intimately to social networks, social mobilization, and, ultimately action (see also Juergensmeyer, 2011; Taves, 2010).

Indeed, taking action as the sociological starting point is precisely the strategy outlined by Isacco Turina (2007). The social anthropological critique regarding ethnocentrism and polarization in the secularization thesis echoes in Turina’s own observations about the state of the debate (2007, p. 162). Moreover, he points out, the broad reach of secularization theory may be less relevant in societies characterized by religious pluralism rather than a single dominant but declining religious tradition, especially insofar as it does not provide for individual agency (p. 170). He also questions its “value for the sociology of religion, which in my view is more interested

²⁰ Here are echoes of Simmel, who is particularly concerned with human experience in modern urban society (the flâneur, who puts on and sheds façade-like identities with the greatest of ease) and with the human desire for self-transcendence. As such, he treats religion not so much as an object as an instrumentality—religion answers the ‘how?’ question for him, insofar as the religious identity is deployed in the quest for self-transcendence.

in interrelations between religion and other social practices than it is in ‘pure’ religion” (p. 163). Turina proposes instead an approach avoiding what he identifies as key flaws insofar as it “avert[s] allegations of ideology; [is] applicable to any religion; [is] operational for qualitative research; and [does] not provide a binary alternative (decline/re-enchantment)” (p. 163). I reproduce these at length because they represent crucial goals for any contemporary social theory: neutrality, universality, empirical falsifiability, and invulnerability to false dichotomies.

Turina shifts the focus of secularization from societies as a whole to “human actions,” which he defines as “any individual or group conduct that is observable from outside” (p. 164). In stressing the importance of empirical observability, he notes, “religion has social consequences only to the extent that it has an effect on the course of people’s action, even (or mainly) when action does not relate to the religious sphere” (p. 164). For him, secularization should be understood as a “property of action,” such that any action can be understood as having been sacralized, secularized, or desecularized.²¹ To wit: “an action is secularized if those who carry it out are not concerned with (any doctrine about) a divinity’s will or preference for the way in which it should be done or for the simple fact of doing it or not” (p. 165).

While Turina is quick to claim his treatment of secularization is a “neutral

²¹ Turina explicitly roots his argument in Max Weber’s theories of action (Turina, 2007, pp. 164-166). Though Turina does not state as much, it appears that he is attempting to respond to Karel Dobbelaere’s charge that many theories of secularization and rationalization do not attend sufficiently to the distinctions Weber made among different types of action (Dobbelaere, 2002, p. 87).

operational definition,” not an explanatory or predictive theory (p. 164), nonetheless shifting secularization’s object from social structure to social action constitutes a paradigm shift. No longer a unidimensional binary, secularization becomes a segmented process that “proceeds or recedes at different paces in the various spheres of human activity” (p. 166), not necessarily in relation with one another.

Paradoxically, this expands, rather than contracts, the reach of secularization theory, insofar, as Turina points out, one’s scope of inquiry may vary from the individual (“any person is likely to be secularized in some of his or her actions and not in others”) to the group or even the nation (p. 166). Moreover, the focus on action, rather than structure, provides “a conceptual frame for the study of interactions between individuals and religious organization” (p. 168), especially insofar as:

strategies of religious organizations for gaining social influence sometimes rely more on particular domains of action than on explicit and direct reference to ultimate religious beliefs and religious practices since the latter often try to attach religious meaning to some of the former’s actions. This is as important an influence as that exercised through specifically religious dogmas, rituals and the like. (pp. 168-169)

I quote this claim at length because of its direct applicability to the study of contemporary religious engagement in a post-secular environment, that is, an environment constituted by “discourses that are critical towards, though ultimately dependent on the awareness of the earlier hegemonic status of, secularism” (Granholm, 2013, p. 65). As the case studies in this dissertation reveal, religious organizations deploy multi-faceted strategies to sacralize the behaviors of their prospective and current adherents. While organization-based informants may claim

(and not all do) that they seek a hegemonic sacralization (i.e., they hope believers will “give their lives to Christ” or become “*ba’alei t’shuvah*” (literally “masters of return,” or those who have moved from a secular life to a religious one and for whom Torah governs every aspect of one’s existence), the observable social reality may well be that they emphasize certain spheres of action over others.

Turina suggests within a given religious organization, social researchers track changes in the relative secularization level of different activities, which, of course, may change over time and help clarify the nature of religiosity within the particular group. He also proposes that researchers measure what he calls the “secularization differential,” that is, the “difference in religious concerns within and outside the [given] group,” which may be made visible in “contrasting attitudes (religious or secularized),” which become visible through “the feelings, discourses and reactions of the group towards society at large, and vice versa” (p. 170). Interreligious marriages, he suggest, are a good object of study using this approach, insofar as the fine-grained study of specific agreements and conflicts might challenge conventional assumptions about the perceived secularity of such pairings. Ultimately, Turina notes, this ability to determine “which domains of activity are more or less secularized in a given social and historical context” yield a “richer description of religion-society interactions” (p. 169) and a more flexible tool with which to understand “activities that cease to have religious meaning, and those that take it on,” as well as “interactions and differences, both at macro and at micro level” (p. 171).

Combination and reduction of Turina’s terms leads to the following assertion:

any individual or group conduct that is observable from outside...is secularized if those who carry it out are not concerned with (any doctrine about) a divinity's will or preference for the way in which it should be done or for the simple fact of doing it or not. (p. 171)

This reveals three structural problems with the approach. The first is simple enough to correct insofar as it consists in Turina's conflation of the idea of "religion" with "doctrine" and "divinity." Thus, we might reformulate the sentence to read, "Any individual or group conduct that is observable from outside...is secularized if those who carry it out are not concerned, with respect to the way in which it should be done or for the simple fact of doing it or not, with motivations and purposes commonly apprehended as related to the sacred." This revision has the added benefit of reducing the number of minds at issue from two types (the concerns of the actors and the will of the "divine") to one (those of the actors). However, this very benefit highlights the second structural problem with the definition: the phrase "are concerned with," which presumes the researcher's ability to know and understand the actors' state of mind but does not indicate a means by which to do so. That said, my revision reinforces the problem by adding the phrase, "commonly apprehended," but at least does not compound it insofar as any method to ascertain the actors' concerns presumably also would reveal their apprehensions. To the contemporary reader, the language of "concern" and "apprehension" might appear to over-emphasize worry and doubt; that is not my intent. Rather, following Bender's (2003, 2010) example, I use "apprehend" and "apprehension" in the same way William James does so as to avoid a cognitive-

affective dichotomy. My third objection is to Turina's assertion that his focus on action necessarily refers to "consciousness and explicit agency," or intention, and that such an approach can have "little to say about behaviour unconsciously influenced by religious values" (p. 170). Turina seems to be arguing that his approach is not comprehensive without a method by which to ascertain the actors' states of mind. However, his claim actually is not necessary for his approach to be deemed successful, insofar as an extreme application of Turina's approach reduces his claim to the simple notion that the secularity or sacrality is visible through individual and collective action. Assuming one overcomes the second objection above—the problem of the actors' states of mind—then intention and explicit agency are extraneous to Turina's approach.

We are left, then, to focus on action and, more specifically, interaction. As my case studies will demonstrate, it is precisely the focus on action—and not intention—that allows the empirical observer to tease out the nuances of secularization and sacralization, putting into sharp relief, for example, the secular influences on religious organizations and the religious influences on supposedly secular individuals. Moreover, the approach advocated here is responsive to the limitations on accepting group self-definitions (including those shaped by secularization) as given *a priori*:

Institutions cannot guarantee their own boundaries, the scope of their reference. ...As the failure of theories of market failure and secularization both attest, we, in fact, have no adequate theory about how the boundaries of institutions shift, the ways in which different activities, persons, and objects are appropriated, claimed, and/or captured by one field as opposed to another, or subject to their blending. (Friedland, 2009, p. 70)

Before theory is even possible, one must have a context within which to observe the behavior and one must explicitly seek out the terms of connection that define the context. If religion appears as a discursive field of communication and communicative action and is definable as religious within a specific observable social situation (see Besecke, 2001), then it follows that social network theory may help frame the field.

From horizons of significance to terms of connection: Social network theory

There is an old joke about a Jewish man stuck alone on a desert island for many years. When he is finally rescued, he takes his rescuers on a tour of the island. “Why have you built two synagogues?” one asks him. “This is the one where I pray,” the man replies, “and this is the one where I wouldn’t be caught dead.”

What does this joke have to do with the sociology of religion? At first glance, an observer might note the construction of the two synagogues and the patterns of the man’s attendance and forms of worship in the one rather than the other. Given the discipline’s current attention to practice and lived religion, this might seem appropriate. Taking a second look, however, the observer might wonder why the man even built the second synagogue, if not to tell his rescuers that he did not use it. Put another way, the meaning of the boycotted desert island synagogue did not and could not become clear until there was someone to tell. Moreover, it seems clear, at least from the joke, the man’s rescuers must have been Jewish. Absent a cultural context within which to express the meaning of his actions, the man never would have said

what he did; imagine him telling a Protestant or a Hindu rescuer, “This is the place I don’t pray.” So why build it? Only an interlocutor familiar with East-Central European Jewish religious customs, including the jocular tradition of criticizing religious authority, would understand the man’s point. Arguably, then, the larger religious meaning of the joke depends on the discursive field created by the man and his rescuer through the establishment (or perhaps pre-existence) of a religious relationship between them. Thus, the joke roughly illustrates the point I wish to make in this dissertation about religion as a discursive field created and maintained through a social network.

The idea of the social network appears to originate in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s 1940 lecture, “On Social Structure,” in which he declares social anthropology’s interest in the scientific study of “the set of actually existing relations, at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings” (p. 4), insofar as “social institutions, in the sense of standardized modes of behavior, constitute the machinery by which a social structure, a network of social relations, maintains its existence and its continuity” (p. 9). Most histories of social network approaches begin with J. A. Barnes (1954), who first operationalized the concept: “The image I have is of a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other” (p. 43). As Jan Fuhse and Sophie Mützel point out, however, Barnes, among others, evidenced “a systematic disregard of culture” in his attempt to document the “‘objective’ relations underlying social phenomena” (2011, p. 1070)

A number of reviews survey the history of social network ideas (Fuhse & Mützel, 2011; Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006; Piselli, 2007); as Knox, Savage, and Harvey observe, while a tightly-knit epistemic community has emerged that is dedicated to the formal-technical analysis of social networks, the application of social network theory in other disciplines, such as anthropology, has been less consistent. Therefore, before moving to the consideration of a social network approach to the study of religion after secularization, it is appropriate to review some prior uses of social network ideas in the sociology of religion. To be sure, this will be a more or less representative, though far from exhaustive, survey of social network ideas in the sociology of religion; a number of publications not discussed here are listed in the bibliographies of the articles referenced below.

Some sociologists of religion have used social network ideas to challenge the importance attributed to conventional religious indicators such as doctrine or formal organizational affiliation. Yinger (1968) proposes a network-based definition of religious intermarriage as “the product of the degree of religious heterogeneity in the marriage pair and in their social networks” (p. 106). The purpose of this definition is to move analysis beyond the unidimensional consideration of formal religious affiliation toward assessment of other dimensions of religious homogeneity and heterogeneity. Stark and Bainbridge (1980) find “social networks play an essential role in recruitment to” new religious movements, indeed “a group’s effectiveness in gaining recruits depends heavily on the extent to which its members belong to or can enter social networks outside the group;” their findings extend as well to

“conventional religions” (p. 1392). Wade Clark Roof (1978), Marie Cornwall (1987, 1989), and Samuel Stroope (2012) are among those who use social network approaches to demonstrate that embeddedness in congregational networks deepens not only participation but also practice and belief. Lundby (1988) picks up in Norway where Barnes left off using social network thinking as a tool for understanding closed circles, a means for practicing religious Norwegians to mark religious insiders and outsiders. “Seen from the outside, then,” Lundby writes:

it is usual to comprehend such religious communities as closed circles. “Ordinary people” [that is, “Christian” but non-religious] behave in accordance with this and keep off. Seen from the inside, the social interaction of the members confirms the existence of closed religious circles. (Lundby, 1988, p. 61)

He warns, however, of a polarization of this difference, such that the “closed circle” of religious commitment becomes so tight as to become detached from the parish and national common culture.

To be sure, the establishment of new social networks themselves constitutes evidence against the strong form of the secularization thesis (Bogomilova, 2004, p. 4); moreover, there is some evidence social networks are more important to structuring social life than previously may have been assumed. For example, Sara Harkness and Charles Super (2001) found “reciprocal helping networks,” rather than structures of kinship or clan, were at the core of social life in a rural Kenyan community. However, my purpose in arguing for attention to social networks is methodological rather than substantive, to the extent that social networks are more

easily visible to the empirical researcher.

The rationale offered by Alejandro Portes and his colleagues, with respect to the sociological study of transnationalism, for using individuals and social networks as the primary unit of analysis, is compelling as well for the social anthropological study of religion. They note that while “broader [social] structures” certainly do play a role, it is at a secondary level, to the extent that “a study that begins with the history and activities of individuals is the most efficient way of learning about the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects” (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 220). This basic information then provides the building blocks through which to “delineate the networks that make transnational enterprises possible, identify the transnational entrepreneurs’ counterparts in the home country, and garner information to establish the aggregate structural effects of these activities” (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 220). This also is not to deny the importance or relevance of less immediately visible aspects of religion, such as doctrine, but even doctrinal questions can be made apparent in discursive fields, as Michele Dillon (1999, p. 304) has shown.

There is scattered support in empirical sociological and anthropological literature for a social network approach to the study of religion. Jimmy Sanders, for example, has reviewed the extent to which ethnic churches create a “social web” for the religious socialization of youth (2002, pp. 329-331, 344-345). Peter Callero points to the ways in which social roles generate identity construction (2003, p. 125). Steven Vertovec notes social networks are constitutive of social identity and practice (2001,

pp. 574, 578). Paul Chambers traces the decline of religion in Wales to the decline of the social networks that enacted it (Chambers, 2003, p. 80); in the same volume, Rob Hirst shows that network connections can predict church affiliation (Hirst, 2003, pp. 90-93). Two strong recent methodological statements come from studies of religion and migration: Manuel Vásquez (2008) and Helen Rose Ebaugh (2010). Vásquez observes that networks help “highlight the fact that places are always interconnected and marked with crisscrossing relations of power...[and allow] us to embed space and the practices of place-making in dynamic fields of domination and resistance” (2008, p. 168). Ebaugh calls for using social network theory to analyze the relationship between religion and immigration and the spread of global religious movements:

specification of relevant actors and the ties between them through which religious resources flow challenges us as researchers to operationalize global transactions in a very practical and grounded manner, amenable to the tools of our trade in terms of empirical research methods. Focus upon the processes whereby religious systems become globalized, especially in terms of religious beliefs and practices transplanted by the increasing numbers of migrants settling in diverse areas of the world, is one way to ground our analyses of what is happening and how it is happening in terms of global religion. (Meyer, Barker, Ebaugh, & Juergensmeyer, 2011, pp. 244-245)

While Vásquez insists that networks remain conceptually subordinate to the actors within them (Vásquez, 2008, p. 168) and warns against romanticizing them—“we should ...not assume that intimacy, trust, and emotional attachment are automatic ingredients of all networks” (2008, p. 170)—Ebaugh cautions against being drawn into the “very complex and often mathematical analysis of social ties” (Ebaugh, 2011, p. 245) and makes her methodological case only with respect to the specific situations to which she has applied it. Nevertheless, as they no doubt would agree, the point has

applicability far beyond the study of religious movements and immigration.

In the end, it is Barnes himself who may have offered the simplest and clearest statement regarding the utility of social network ideas in the wake of secularization: the social network is “that part of the total network that is left behind when we remove the groupings and chains of interaction which belong strictly to the territorial and industrial systems” (p. 43). Indeed, Heidi Campbell appears to do just that by considering religious activity online (a useful site indeed for exploring social networks):

Religious practice online is marked by a set of common characteristics, which are shaped by the network structure and functionality of information communication technologies. These key traits include facilitating a networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and a multisite reality. Together, these characteristics present an understanding of religion that is informed by a dynamic and integrated relationship between the sacred and the mundane online.

...The internet serves as a mirror to highlight social shifts occurring in the public understanding of social practice at many different levels, the performance of religion being just one of these. Thus these five characteristics can be seen as markers describing the current social milieu surrounding much of Western religious culture. By observing how traditional beliefs and relationships are re-negotiated by individuals online, we see networked religion illustrate just one arena in which the trends of being in a networked society are impacting simply another facet of contemporary society. (Campbell, 2012, pp. 65, 84)

The characteristics Campbell identifies as constitutive of online social networks are evident in the approach and case studies presented here: the differentiation and reconfiguration of institutional and community structures; the ways in which

individuals negotiate and experiment with—try on—religious identities; mutual recognition through shared scripts and practices; and the diffuse, porous nature of non-institutional religious identification and religious activity.

Incorporating the insights of social network theory prompts us to shift our view of the religious field, following Warner's (1993) call for more focus on congregations and collectivities, but at the same time looking for new forms of belonging, not in response to individualism but taking individualism as a given (Delanty, 2003, pp. 186-195; Turner, 2012) and also bearing in mind, paradoxically, that "[human agents] cannot free themselves from the practices by which they are embedded in the world of other people" (Keane 2006, p. 322). This approach begins from the premise that the processes described by secularization theory largely have run their course and that new underlying trends have begun to emerge. Institutions offer religiosity as an instrument with which to contend with the world—when congregational preachers distinguish "what we do" from "what they do," they not only define themselves in terms of practice rather than belief, but also implicitly offer their religious orientation as a more successful way of living. Secularization theory refers broadly to "vertical" differentiation of individuals from collectives and therefore views individual religiosity as the ultimate consumer commodification of religion. By contrast, the approach I am advocating here draws on Bryan Turner's notion of social secularization—which attends to "many of the conventional sociological measures of religious vitality, [such as] church membership, belief in God, religious experiences, and acts of devotion such as prayer and pilgrimage"—and

focuses on the “horizontal” differentiations of individuals and collectivities from one another. As Turner notes, “this is “something more than merely a decline in religious practice but rather its transformation by the twin processes of commercialization and democratization ...not the quantitative erosion of religion but its qualitative transformation” (Turner, 2012, p. 142; see also Calhoun, Juergensmeyer & VanAntwerpen, 2011, p. 11). Indeed, religion in the wake of this process well may be “more attuned to contemporary circumstances once the detritus of tradition is cleared away” (Demerath, 2007, p. 67).

Congregations, for example, offer a particular group identity; to attend a religious service for the first time is to “try on” that identity in a non-threatening way. Thus, a productive approach might be to follow the ways in which individuals and groups actively define themselves through the articulation of a particular way of being in the world, rather than by focusing on their propositional theological debates. Such an approach also would be consistent with McCutcheon’s caution against “studying the meaning of an object” (contested propositionally) and call instead to attend to:

the historically embedded conventions that allow some thing to become meaningful for a specific group at a specific time; ...no longer studying the identity of a group but the contingent structures in which particular social actors come to think of themselves as having shared affinities and estrangements (to borrow terms from Bruce Lincoln) as well as the techniques they use to authorize those structures as if they were eternal and universal; ...ending our studies of traditions and instead examining the contestable means by which traditions and canons are created and legitimized, as if they carry an internal eternal kernel. (McCutcheon, 2012, p. 91)

Beyond congregations, different historically embedded conventions come into

sharper relief when we move from secularization theory to an approach informed by social network theory.

For those using secularization theories to view religion, typical test cases, that is, controversies that probed the limits of what might be thought possible, or imaginable,²² tended to involve matters of divergent belief: Protestantism, communism, and atheism. Secularization broadly presupposes the vertical differentiation of individuals from collectives (both societal and institutional) and competition between religious and civil specializations, ultimately making religion a matter between the divine (however imagined) and the individual (in this secularization and Protestantism are bound up with one another). The metanarrative, if not one of decline, certainly is one of reduction.

Shifting the approach to social networks, however, points the observer to test cases revolving around divergent practices: same-sex marriage, wearing a headscarf, ritual slaughter. Religion becomes visible in the horizontal differentiations of individuals and collectivities from one another (at the individual, organizational, and societal levels), through contested recognition of collectivities, and via competition between different forms of communitarian integration. The metanarrative is multiplicity—and it is through the multiplicity and diversity of the case studies that follow that I have come to the conclusions expressed here.

²² Robert Orsi (2005) uses the language of “imagination” to consider the ways in which people think about and experience religious or secular worldviews; see also Taylor (2004).

THREE. SYMBOLIC SUBJECT, SUBJECTED SYMBOL: MIZUKO KUYO, GENDER, AND THE SOCIAL ORDER IN JAPAN

This chapter documents an early demonstration of how my interstitial view of religion can help solve interpretative dilemmas. In this case, the question is how to explain the popularity and significance of a religious ritual within the secularized context of post-war Japan.²³ Using a gender lens that anticipates the approaches outlined in the previous two chapters, I reconsider the terms of connection, first decoupling the *mizuko kuyo* ritual from what seem to be relevant related doctrines about abortion, death, and the afterlife, and then reconnecting the ritual to the individual actor through examining the implications (both institutional and individual) of encouraging and participating in the performance of the ritual itself. The meaning of the ritual, thus, is to be found not in its relationship to propositional doctrine but rather in its relationship with those who produce and perform it. By shifting attention to the relationship between women and the performance of the ritual, the case illuminates a somewhat more complex dynamic involving gender, motherhood, and the post-secularization rhetoric of traditionalist Japanese culture.

1. The Rashōmon effect: A tale of five scholars

Robert Wuthnow (1981) argues that the study of religion has been divided by “two competing epistemological orientations,” one derived from “Cartesian dualism,”

²³ Turner notes that “religion has been democratized through commercialization” (2012, p. 138); if anything, this case, looking at religion in post-war Japan, considers the inverse, namely, the commercialization of religion after democratization.

the other from “wholistic epistemology” (Wuthnow, 1981, p. 17). For the purposes of this paper, we shall focus on the epistemological division between what Wuthnow terms “consistency” and “coherence”: consistency, derived from the Cartesian alienation of subject from object, reflects the search for a belief system that is “accurate and internally consistent”; whereas coherence, reflecting a concern with “meaning,” is concerned with an interdependent relationship between symbols and reality.

This is a simplification of Wuthnow’s argument, but it suffices for the purpose of classifying the existing English language scholarly literature on *mizuko kuyo*. While some scholars (Brooks, LaFleur) have attempted to reconcile *mizuko kuyo* practices with Shinto-Buddhist belief systems (the consistency approach), other scholars (Smith, Hoshino-Takeda, Werblowsky) have focused on the phenomenology of the practice in relation to particular concerns with reality (the coherence approach). Below, I shall expand on the approaches of each of these five scholars.

Anne Page Brooks (1981) attempts to determine whether *mizuko kuyo* is “authentically Buddhist,” and concludes that she cannot make such a determination. Her article is concerned with the elements of the *kuyo* ritual, the history of the Jizo cult in Japan, and the contemporary practice of *mizuko kuyo*. She posits:

there would seem to be among Japanese an intuitive perception of abortion as the interruption of life. Thus, the “problem” among Japanese would be to find ways to help those who have interrupted the life process rid themselves of the bad feelings they have as a result of their actions. (Brooks, 1981, p. 134)

Brooks finds that “Japanese Buddhism can incorporate *mizuko kuyo* into its practices whereas a religion that puts greater stress on theory or dogma could not” (Brooks, 1981, p. 138). In her conclusion, Brooks suggests that the practice of *mizuko kuyo* might be subject to legitimate criticism for “the habit of patching up things for the moment” (Brooks, 1981, p. 139). Raising concerns about the increasing commercialization of the ritual and about the use of Jizo images, she expresses “hope for deepening the religious significance of the rituals” (Brooks, 1981, p. 142).

It might seem that William LaFleur’s (1990, 1992) discussions of “moral bricolage” (LaFleur, 1990, p. 531, *passim*) pick up where Brooks leaves off—taking “patching up things” as an essential element of Japanese moral philosophy, and therefore, not subject to criticism. He gently chides Western scholars for their “whole-cloth attempts to identify the Japanese ethic” (LaFleur, 1990, p. 529). Arguing that there is in fact “conflict and contestation” (LaFleur, 1990, p. 531) in the Japanese ethical tradition, he traces a history of both contestation and consensus over the morality of abortion, and he concludes that Buddhists and others have come to accommodate abortion because it is “a way of enhancing the quality of social life itself” (LaFleur, 1990, p. 539). Access to abortion, he finds, contributes to the stability and prosperity of families and thereby helps to maintain the social order—a higher good than the preservation of the single life of the fetus.

Liquid Life, LaFleur’s book-length expansion on this discussion—and the first of only two English-language book-length treatments of the *mizuko kuyo*

phenomenon,²⁴ does little more than to place this moral philosophy into broader historical and political contexts. The book is divided into three parts, entitled, “Original Concepts,” “Historical Processes,” and “Contemporary Issues.” In “Concepts,” LaFleur traces the historical development of metaphors and symbols important to *mizuko kuyo*, including the Buddhist prohibitions against taking life (the “First Precept”) and the conspicuous absence of a Buddhist creation myth; the idea of water as a common denominator of birth, death, rebirth; and the Japanese adoption and adaptation of the bodhisattva Jizo. In “Processes,” the author investigates the course of abortion and infanticide during the Edo period and the Meiji Restoration. Rather than examining the symbolism at work in the ritual, he looks at the ritual as a performance—particularly during the Meiji Restoration—which blurs the line between Jizo’s roles as a guardian of babies intended to be born and as a guardian of aborted fetuses. While abortion and infanticide were tolerated during the Edo period, such practices were outlawed during the Meiji Restoration. LaFleur treats *mizuko kuyo* almost as a natural outgrowth of abortion (in spite of its apparent inconsistency with Buddhist doctrine) in light of the development of a state ideology of what he calls “fecundism,” a policy and program of encouraging population growth (and, by extension, increased military and economic strength). *Mizuko kuyo* is a ritual response to the “violation” of fecundist policies, which he associates in particular with State Shinto during the Meiji Restoration. Just as Jizo has an equivocal role as protector of

²⁴ The second is Hardacre’s *Marketing the menacing fetus in Japan* (1997), which appeared after this case study’s completion and in any event does not change my assessment of the situation.

live babies and of aborted fetuses, so is the ritual itself open-ended enough to encompass rituals both for the provision of healthy births and for the propitiation of aborted fetuses. In “Issues,” LaFleur constructs an explanation for the current acceptance of abortion that is similar, if not identical to, his “social order” thesis in his 1990 article.

For both Brooks and LaFleur, the challenge of *mizuko kuyo* lies in reconciling abortion with the traditional Buddhist opposition to taking life. To use Wuthnow’s terminology, they seek to show how *mizuko kuyo* is, despite all appearances, consistent with Japanese tradition. While Brooks’s concluding remarks about deepening the meaning of the ritual could imply that further study might better employ a “wholistic epistemology” (concerned with meaning), nonetheless her contrition at being unable to link *mizuko kuyo* with “authentic” Buddhism suggests that she remains in the Cartesian paradigm. LaFleur locates himself quite explicitly in this paradigm: his recourse to Stout’s “moral bricolage” is an attempt to find consistency in inconsistency.

Let us now turn to those studies of *mizuko kuyo* that might be said to turn on Wuthnow’s notion of coherence. Hoshino Eiki and Takeda Dosho’s article on *mizuko kuyo* (1987) is the only English-language translation of original Japanese research on the subject, with the exception of LaFleur’s extensive quotation of Ochiai Seiko. Hoshino and Takeda’s work falls into the category of coherence: it seeks to show that *mizuko kuyo* is a “trend...closely connected to the religious views of the Japanese people, especially their concept of the spirits of the dead” (Hoshino and Takeda,

1987, p. 305). They outline a history of the Japanese concept of spirits of the dead and draw parallels between *mizuko kuyo* and rituals concerned with propitiating such spirits, who, if angered, often are said to curse their descendants (or parents and siblings, in the case of *mizuko* spirits). What distinguishes the current phenomenon from past abortion practices and memorial rituals is that the *mizuko* is as fully human as is any adult ancestor meritorious of ritual memorialization. “Contemporary *mizuko kuyo*,” Hoshino and Takeda conclude, “has the purpose of providing comfort from the feeling of indebtedness and anxiety which comes from a fear of this curse [by the aborted fetus against its living family]” (Hoshino & Takeda, 1987, p. 316). The authors close their study with a comparison between *mizuko kuyo* for aborted fetuses and *petto kuyo* for dead house pets, concluding that the rationale for memorializing dead house pets is that they, too, have been “humanized” as full members of the family. In short, the Hoshino-Takeda study is an attempt to prove a coherence between *mizuko kuyo* and the social reality of the Japanese spirit world; for them, understanding the phenomenon entails understanding the broader problem of the spirit world.

Like Hoshino and Takeda, Bardwell Smith (1988) is concerned with the link between *mizuko kuyo* and the reality of death. His approach to *mizuko kuyo* directly addresses the relationship between the symbol and the reality: “at the heart of the phenomenon lies both the experience of death and difficulties encountering this death” (Smith, 1988, p. 5). Smith applies Robert Jay Lifton’s work on “the broken connection” to *mizuko kuyo* in order to interpret the ritual as a “prospective

experience of family bonds [and] becomes an avenue for discovering hidden connections in life (in Lifton's sense) and a source of deep meaning" (Smith, 1988, p. 9) He comes to two conclusions: first, "that behind the attribution of misfortune to abortion is a much larger issue, namely, the attempt to understand what underlies the confusions and fragmentation of a culture whose connections with its past are simultaneously broken and yet in many ways still alive" (Smith, 1988, p. 15); and second, that "in Lifton's sense, Jizo assists in the confrontation of death, and death equivalents" (Smith, 1988, p. 17). For Smith, then, *mizuko kuyo* is at its heart a "social drama" (Smith, 1988, p. 22) within which women, couples, and families can come to terms with the death or abortion of their fetus.

R. J. Zwi Werblowsky's "Notulae on the Most Important 'New Religion' of Japan" (1991) defies classification according to Wuthnow's terms or any other. At some points he argues for consistency. For example, criticizing as "utterly meaningless and even foolish" the "reproach" that Brooks did not determine whether or not *mizuko kuyo* is "authentically" Buddhist, Werblowsky writes:

Considering the "division of labor" so characteristic of East Asian religions (as regards Japan: Shinto for fertility, life, birth, marriage; Buddhism for death, funerals, and the hereafter) it is inevitable that both the practice of *mizuko kuyo* and our discussion of it will have a largely, though not exclusively, Buddhist slant. (Werblowsky, 1991, p. 296)

In this regard, Werblowsky's argument seems to succumb to Cartesian dualism, especially as he distinguishes between "the practice of *mizuko kuyo*" (object) and "our discussion of it" (subject), and also as he classifies *mizuko kuyo* into a doctrinal category of belief. At other times, however, Werblowsky's essay reads as a call for

coherence. He prefaces his discussion with preliminary comments on “memorial services,” “graves and their paraphernalia,” and “souls,” thereby theoretically linking this phenomenon with other Japanese social realities (and reactions to them). He draws extensive links between *mizuko kuyo* and the abortion rate, at times digressing into cross-cultural comparisons of Chinese Buddhist, Thai Buddhist, and Roman Catholic attitudes toward abortion. As such, his study becomes increasingly phenomenological and is located firmly in the coherence camp. Werblowsky comes to three conclusions. First, as to the origin of contemporary *mizuko kuyo*, “it is related to the changing structure of families and the related structure of temple finance...a means to support temple economy” (Werblowsky, 1991, p. 324). Second, regarding the relationship, or rather the lack thereof, between *mizuko kuyo* and the belief in vengeful spirits of the dead, “the *tatari-sawari* complex...is in reality much less dominant in the actual experience of many women than the feelings of sadness, perhaps also of guilt, and concern for the well-being of the *mizuko* soul” (Werblowsky, 1991, p. 327). Third, as to whether or not there is a direct link between abortion and *mizuko kuyo*, Werblowsky finds that there is such a connection, and predicts that “the abortion boom will be declining and so will the *mizuko kuyo* boom” (Werblowsky, 1991, p. 336).

A brief digression is in order here, to consider the purported link between abortion and *mizuko kuyo*. Even the most cursory review of the existing English-language literature reveals that scholars have taken for granted that there is a direct relationship between the number of abortions and the popularity of *mizuko kuyo*.

Furthermore, the same scholars, persisting in their linkage between abortion and *mizuko kuyo*, tend to argue at one point or another that the practice of abortion is generally A Bad Thing and that a reduction in the number of abortions would be A Good Thing. Consistency approaches suggest that temple support for *mizuko kuyo* is at odds with Buddhist doctrinal opposition to abortion; coherence approaches argue that *mizuko kuyo* is the direct result of the recent explosion in the number of abortions in Japan. Neither of these arguments is necessarily wrong—in fact, both seem self-evidently true—but there is no English-language study that reveals how many women who have had abortions actually go on to do *mizuko kuyo*. More to the point, the fact that *mizuko kuyo* is a ritual for women who have had abortions does not mean that *mizuko kuyo* is popular for the same reasons that abortion might be said to be popular, nor does it mean that *mizuko kuyo* advances the same value structures as does the principle behind accessibility to safe and legal abortion.

2. Another perspective: The people involved

Neither the consistency approach nor the coherence approach has addressed the question, “Why *mizuko kuyo*?” from the perspective of the people involved as supplicants and producers. Wuthnow’s typology of consistency and coherence is a useful tool for analyzing the extant English-language literature on *mizuko kuyo*. The search for consistence in the study of *mizuko kuyo* has been extremely effective in eliciting the belief systems that underlie the ritual practice and that motivate the subject (the woman, couple, or family). Similarly, the search for coherence has

enhanced scholarly understanding both of the symbols at work within the ritual and of the realities which those symbols are “models of” and “models for,” to use Geertz’s terminology. What seems to be missing is the relationship between subject and symbol. Wuthnow proposes to move beyond the consistency-coherence dichotomy by means of a structural approach. “Structural analysis is concerned with identifying the conditions that make a symbol *meaningful*, not with describing in elaborate detail what these meanings are.” What, then, are the conditions that make a symbol meaningful? Wuthnow points out:

Symbols are more likely to be regarded as meaningful if the following correspondences can be shown to exist: (1) between the symbol and the internal state of the speaker—sincerity; (2) between the symbol and reality—truth; (3) between the symbol and rules of language—comprehensibility; and (4) between the symbol and the social environment—legitimacy....

Meaningful symbolism is often patterned after the major varieties of social exchange existing in a society. (Wuthnow, 1981, p. 30)

The implications of this approach for *mizuko kuyo* are that instead of looking for a consistent relationship between *mizuko kuyo* and existing Shinto-Buddhist doctrine, or a coherent accounting for the reality that *mizuko kuyo* purports to reflect, our task is to examine the relationship between *mizuko kuyo* and those who produce and take part in it—we must ask, “How do symbols mean?” which is precisely what Caroline Walker Bynum does in her introduction to *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (1985).

Bynum outlines a structural approach, which asks, in her words, “How do symbols mean? not What produces them? or How do they function?” (Bynum, 1985, p. 5). Her thesis is that “experience is gendered...not only do gender symbols invert or

reject as well as reinforce the gender values and gender structures of society, they also may be experienced differently by the different genders.” Bynum posits that the cross-cultural studies in *Gender and Religion* yield a universal conclusion:

Women’s symbols and myths tend to build from social and biological experiences;...women’s mode of using symbols seems given to the muting of opposition, whether through paradox or through synthesis;...women’s myths and rituals tend to explore a state of being....

The synthesis of objective referent and subjective meaning...may be for women less a dialectical process than an acceptance of, a continuous living with, paradox. (Bynum, 1985, pp. 13-14)

The significance of this theoretical approach to *mizuko kuyo* is that unlike other approaches, it does not treat the link between the socio-medical fact of abortion and the ritual fact of *mizuko kuyo*: our concern is not with the relationship between abortion and Buddhist ethics, as the Brooks and LaFleur consistency approaches suggest, nor with the relationship between abortion and death, as the Hoshino-Takeda and Smith coherence approaches suggest. Rather, our task is to examine the relationship between women (the embodied subject) and the performance of the *mizuko kuyo* ritual (the enacted symbol).

Furthermore, instead of comparing *mizuko kuyo* with other *kuyo* rites and instead of comparing the philosophy of *mizuko kuyo* with Shinto-Buddhist philosophies, we might compare the role of gender in the performance of *mizuko kuyo* with other gender roles in Japanese culture. If Bynum’s theory is accurate, then we may find parallels elsewhere in women’s social roles and institutions.

Three interpretations of gender roles in Japan, presented by Ooms (1993), Condon (1985), and Edwards (1989), merit our attention. First, Emily Ooms, writing

on gender and new religions in Japan, discusses the “feminine ideal of the silently suffering, self-sacrificing wife and mother” (Ooms, 1993, p. 109). This suffering resonates in Buddhist doctrine, which holds that it is:

virtually impossible for women to attain enlightenment or salvation because their bad karma was so much greater than that of men....The Meiji woman who wished to preserve her self-respect, achieve public approbation and insure her ultimate salvation had no alternative but to sacrifice her own happiness and endure her suffering with nobility and fortitude. (Ooms, 1993, p. 110)

There is no reason to expect that the *mizuko kuyo* ceremony, concerned as it is with the “bad karma” associated with abortion, should ignore or subvert this traditional attitude toward women. Second, Jane Condon cites social anthropologist Chie Nakane’s observation that “The core of the Japanese family, ancient and modern, is the parent-child relationship, not that between husband and wife” (Condon, 1985, p. 14). The *ie*, the marriage and family structure that forms the basic social unit of traditional Japanese culture, places more emphasis on the vertical transgenerational family structure than on the horizontal marriage relationship. Third, as Walter Edwards indicates in his anthropological treatment of Japanese weddings, the *ie* has come under pressure from the forces of modernity, but has not succumbed fully:

The individual has not replaced the *ie* as the fundamental unit in cultural values, despite the legal changes. Rather, the *katei* has become its successor—particularly in its minimal form as the husband/wife relationship...[it] is the smallest viable social unit, and it is a microcosm for the larger society. (Edwards, 1989, p. 144)

Not only does this observation lead to the inference that *mizuko kuyo* is emphatically *not* about individual liberation, but it also begins to account for the presence of couples, rather than only women, at *mizuko kuyo* rites (although the role of men and

other family members is not the topic of this case study). Cross-cultural survey data appears to bear out Condon's and Edwards's arguments:

In one survey of women in six countries, Japanese women topped the list in...putting one's husband and family first (72 percent).... Another survey revealed that [80 percent] of Japanese...women were content with their lives....The majority of Japanese women...speak of a web of circumstances, obligations and events that have made their role what it is. Although some talk as if they were indeed caught in a web, others see societal restrictions as a warm and protective cocoon. (Edwards, 1989, p. 295)

The significance of this finding is that it leads us to expect that *mizuko kuyo* rituals, insofar as they are concerned with restoring order to a temporarily disrupted socio-cosmic fabric, would tend to re-establish and reinforce that “web of circumstances, obligations, and events” regulating women's roles.

Having considered the possibility of a relationship between *mizuko kuyo* and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles in Japan, we may turn to newer structural interpretations of *mizuko kuyo*. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) views the aborted fetus as an “etiological agent,” an external cause of disease in the individual—specifically, the female individual. *Mizuko kuyo*, the propitiation of the supposedly angry aborted fetus, is therefore, the cure for diseases caused by this external agent. In Wuthnow's terms, Ohnuki-Tierney's etiology points up the correspondence “between the symbol and the internal state of the speaker” in that there is a relationship between the aborted fetus and the health of the woman. Not surprisingly, both Ohnuki-Tierney and Bynum adopt Victor Turner's notion of “multivocality” to describe the variety of ways in which symbols can be appropriated and interpreted by those who make use of them; while Bynum uses it to differentiate between male and female understandings

of symbols, Ohnuki-Tierney uses it to show how “the aborted fetus...[is] a powerful symbol that can embody a variety of meanings and feelings, any one of which may be identified by a particular woman” (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984, p. 157). Indeed, it is the multivocality of the fetus that allows us to use Bynum’s methodology to investigate the *mizuko kuyo* phenomenon: “how” does the ritual for memorializing the fetus mean?

Earlier, I discussed the purported link between abortion and *mizuko kuyo*. Aside from the expressions of remorse written on tablets and in notebooks at the various temples, we have no explanation for why women who have abortions choose to perform *mizuko kuyo*. In her book on gender, Condon relates an interview with Yuri Watanabe, a young woman who has had more than one abortion. Watanabe explains why she chose *not* to perform *mizuko kuyo*:

I myself have never been to a temple to buy one of those *mizuko jizo*. I don’t like the idea of *mizuko*. You admit that there should have been a child. Some people write the name of the child on a wooden tablet and the date he or she . . . well, passed away. If I had had a miscarriage and wanted the child, it would be different. Then I’d buy a *mizuko jizo*. But I’ve refused to admit its existence. Rather than feel sorry for the unborn, actually, I feel sorry for myself for having to make that decision. I decided not to ask forgiveness. It doesn’t matter what religion you believe in, any woman who’s had an abortion certainly feels guilty, whether it’s to God, yourself, or Buddha.

...When I was under anaesthesia during the [second abortion] operation, I had a scary dream that I still see sometimes at night—a deserted earth from which all human beings have vanished. It makes me so afraid. (Condon, 1985, pp. 90-91)

In Ohnuki-Tierney’s terms, Watanabe’s nightmares are caused by an etiological agent—her aborted fetuses. Yet in the sense of multivocality outlined by both Ohnuki-Tierney and Bynum, Watanabe has appropriated the ability to interpret the

abortion on her own terms. She specifically rejects the idea of *mizuko kuyo* precisely because she affirms her independence and her wish *not to be* a mother; for Watanabe, performing *mizuko kuyo* is an act of formally admitting guilt and of expressing a ritual desire to be a mother. For her, it seems, true liberation comes in being able to have an abortion and accept responsibility for it on her own terms, without needing to conform to the expected web of social structures.

Among those situations in which the value of *mizuko kuyo* is affirmed rather than rejected, we might examine two cases, both mentioned by Werblowsky. First, in a “case where a girl appeared in a temple for *kuyo* wearing her high school uniform,” he interprets it as a measure of the “respectability” of teenage abortions (Werblowsky, 1991, p. 312). Whether or not teenage abortions are respectable is irrelevant; what matters here is that this woman, in performing *mizuko kuyo*, chose to reintegrate herself into traditional roles assigned to young Japanese women; she wore a costume that symbolizes her conformity with the social norm: the high school uniform. That she wore her uniform does not signify the acceptance of abortion by society, but rather the acceptance of social mores by the young woman. Second, Werblowsky reproduces the text of a “*mizuko* ‘pop’ song,” a portion of which is transcribed here: “Such fate comes from being a woman, / how could I forget that? ... How bitter not to be able to cuddle my child” (Werblowsky, 1991, pp. 319-320). These selected lyrics—presumably sung, that is, performed (like the ritual), by a young woman—imply that negative karma comes from simply being a woman, and reinforce the value (in its absence) of motherhood.

Finally, it is appropriate to examine the literature of a temple that performs *mizuko kuyo*: does the material itself affirm or refute a gendered interpretation? “The Way to Memorialize One’s Mizuko,” the “promotional brochure” of Shiun-zan Jizo-ji, the Purple Cloud Temple in Chichibu,” forms the appendix to LaFleur’s *Liquid Life*. As a primary source for understanding “how” *mizuko kuyo* means, it is a prime candidate for content analysis according to Bynum’s typology (all quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from LaFleur 1992, pp. 221-222).

1. The *mizuko* resulting from a terminated pregnancy is a child existing in the realm of darkness. The principal things that have to be done for its sake are the making of a full apology and the making of amends to such a child.

4. ...[A stone Jizo image] will constitute an eternal, ongoing ritual of apology and remembrance. [...]

The first passage clearly defines the aborted fetus as a “child,” fully human, not simply an interrupted process free to be reborn later into the body of another child. The instruction requires that the supplicant accept responsibility—and by extension, the karmic consequences—for her actions, namely the taking of another life. In accepting responsibility and taking negative karma upon herself, she must, nonetheless, make “ongoing” “amends” to the “child.” The notion of making amends to someone is quite different from repenting having *done* something; it implies that the ritual involves a continuing relationship between mother and child.

5. ...[If] the father of a later *mizuko* was different than an earlier one,...separate Jizo images will be required. An exception to this could be made if a woman were to discuss this candidly with her second husband and get his permission. Then it would be just as in the case of a woman bringing along into her second marriage the children begotten in an earlier one. [...]

Two phrases here are worth considering: “get his permission” and “bringing along...children.” The first phrase leads to the inescapable conclusion that despite the fact that it is the woman who is responsible for performing the *mizuko kuyo*, ownership of the ritual implements and images remains with the man; and despite the popular impression that *mizuko kuyo* is liberating for women, in many cases “proper” performance of the ritual requires that she subordinate herself to her husband. The second phrase reinforces the idea of treating the *mizuko* as a child with whom the mother has an ongoing maternal relationship. If *mizuko* from previous marriages enjoy the same ritual status as children from previous marriages, then it is highly unlikely that they are substantially different in other ways.

6. When at your home altar you are giving a daily portion of rice and water offering to your deceased ancestors be sure to include the *mizuko* too—and let them know of your decision. [...]

7. To make amends for the fact that you never had to pay anything for the upbringing and education of a *mizuko* you should give to the Buddha every day an offering.... This is an expression of apology to the child for not having given it a love-filled upbringing. Therefore, you should put your love into these acts of remembrance, not being stingy with your time and resources. Once you get into the habit of thinking how much easier it would be simply to make a 10,000-yen contribution once a month, you are missing the whole point. It is far better to put a daily offering on the altar every day.

These two passages further advance the notion that the *mizuko kuyo* ritual “tends to build from [the] social and biological experience” of motherhood (quotation adapted from Bynum 1985, p. 14). The inclusion of the *mizuko* in the ancestor-offering confounds the notion of the *katei* as successor to the *ie* insofar as *mizuko* are specifically inscribed as elements of the transgenerational *ie* structure (see Condon, 1985, p. 14; Edwards, 1989, p. 144). Thus, the *mizuko* ritual addresses motherhood,

not wife-hood. Furthermore, the language in Passage 7 describes not memorial actions, but rather actions for proper parenting—more specifically, proper *mothering*: “put your love into these acts,” “[do not be] stingy with your time and resources,” “once a month [is] missing the whole point[,] it is far better to [be there] every day,” and so on. This language constructs a relationship between subject and symbol, one which reflects traditional Japanese attitudes towards women as mothers.

3. Symbolic subjects and subject symbols in action

Thus, it is possible to account for the link between Seicho no Ie, the political organization known for its anti-abortion stance and for its conservative views on family roles, and the Chichibu Purple Cloud Temple. LaFleur recognizes the importance of the links between the two groups (LaFleur, 1992, pp. 168-169), but his consistency methodology is incapable of revealing *why* the links exist, since the two institutions appear to be doctrinally inconsistent. Far from “liberating” women as autonomous individuals, however, *mizuko kuyo*, at least as it is practiced at Chichibu, reinstates them in a conservative social order through the ritual process. Women accept that they are burdened with negative karma, they accept their dependence on their husbands, and they affirm their traditional place in the “web of circumstances, obligations, and events” that governs their lives (Condon, 1985, p. 295).

It appears that the *mizuko kuyo* ritual involves a relationship between subject and symbol that is more complicated than prior studies would have had us understand. The so-called subject, the woman supplicant, in her performance of the

ritual, incorporates a traditional Japanese gender role such that she becomes a symbol of the ideal Japanese mother, enduring her negative karma with dignity and forbearance. The central symbol of the *mizuko kuyo*, the Jizo image representing both the bodhisattva and the aborted fetus, is subjected to manipulation both by the supplicant (the woman) and by the producers (the temple officiants). Having already been subjected to abortion, the fetus is called upon to avenge itself to the greater good of the traditional Japanese social order. In Ohnuki-Tierney's terms, it becomes an etiological agent threatening to wreak havoc unless propitiated through a prescribed *mizuko kuyo* ritual. The ritual, by reinscribing the subject into the symbolically ordered society and by subjecting the symbol to socio-religious control, reinforces the social fabric of traditional Japanese culture.

FOUR. WHEN THE MEDIUM ISN'T THE MESSAGE: THE TRUE LOVE WAITS CAMPAIGN

In this chapter, like the previous one, I attend closely to the attempt by institutional leaders to communicate specific religious meanings to a target audience of prospective participants. However, there are two important differences. First, Seicho no Ie appears to have addressed its campaign for *mizuko kuyo* to all women post-abortion or miscarriage, regardless of religious observance, whereas the case study in this chapter, on the Southern Baptist True Love Waits chastity campaign, is focused on teens already living within the conservative Protestant Christian subculture. Second, whereas virtually all *mizuko kuyo* rituals take place within the formal physical boundaries of a temple, the True Love Waits campaign seeks to diffuse itself into the general lived teen culture by using ideological differentiation to connect and cohere the religious field. Studying religion-in-communication and the negotiated use of that communication by participants illuminates the middle ground where group-versus-group distinctions are made that both compete with and co-opt the patterns of other communities of divergent practice. The True Love Waits campaign is an attempt to market not culture, nor self-improvement and relaxation, but, rather, an entire way of being in the world and of indicating one's relationship to the world in which one lives.

“Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship.”

In *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, political scientist Benjamin Barber describes a scene of the future

in shimmering pastels, a busy portrait of onrushing economic, technological, and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize peoples everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s—pressing nations into one homogenous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce. (Barber, 1995, p. 4)

The “first operating imperative” of this McWorld, he observes, is to establish through the media “the cultural values necessary to material consumption.” What are the effects of this imperative? “It is hard to know,” he writes, “exactly what, beyond simple consumption, the impact of selling ambience by promoting rock music [on MTV] will be either in America or on the hundred cultures whose youth are now tuned in to it” (Barber, 1995, p. 109). According to some religious groups, the effect can be seen in the proliferation of premarital promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS. For these groups—especially for conservative Protestant Christians—the equation is simple: the media are selling sex, and America’s youth are buying.

During the 1980s, representatives of these conservative Christian groups tried to resist this media popularization of sexuality with get-tough campaigns that stressed the negative consequences of irresponsible sexual behavior. The message was, “Just

say no,” and the tactic was fear. The campaign was not exactly successful:

A survey conducted during the 1992 Winter Youth Celebrations at Ridgecrest Conference Center, N.C., revealed that the majority of youth surveyed were Christians—95%. The survey also revealed that one out of every five youth has had sex already. Of those who have had sex already, 41% admitted to being sexually active at the time of the survey. (*True Love Waits*, p. 1)

Partially because Christian youth simply were not getting it, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, it seems, decided to make a change: if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. Of course that is not to say they decided to stop denouncing sexual promiscuity—they just decided instead to focus on promoting sexual purity. If the secular media could successfully market and sell sex, there was no reason in the world that religious leaders could not successfully market and sell abstinence. The result: True Love Waits.

The True Love Waits campaign is an inter-denominational program promoting premarital chastity. It is led by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board with the cooperation of 27 other Christian denominations.²⁵ Approximately 250,000 young people in the United States had signed the True Love Waits pledge by the mid-

²⁵ These include: “American Christian Cause; Assemblies of God; Baptist World Alliance; Campus Crusade for Christ; Christian Camping International; Church of God Cleveland; Church of the Nazarene; Evangelical Covenant Church; Evangelical Fellowship of Canada; Family of the Americas; Fellowship of Christian Athletes; General Association of General Baptists; Grace Brethren Fellowship of Churches; Mennonite Church; National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc.; National Network of Youth Ministries; Open Bible Standard Churches; Pentecostal Church of God; Reachout Ministries; Sonlife Ministries; Student Discipleship Ministries; The Salvation Army; The Wesleyan Church; Youth America; Youth for Christ; Youth Specialties; and Youth With a Mission. In addition, well-known Christian authors James Dobson and Josh McDowell and contemporary Christian recording artists Steven Curtis Chapman, Michael W. Smith, DC Talk, Petra, and Lisa Bevill have expressed support for the campaign.” *True Love Waits-A Fact Sheet*, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (1994, p. 1).

1990s (Living the Word, 1995). Various denominations created rituals of commitment to accompany the pledge, and some youth began to wear a white purity ribbon, analogous not only to the red AIDS ribbon of the 1980s and 1990s, but also to the temperance movement of the late 1800s, during which young people made pledges to God and their community, and publicized their commitment by wearing white.²⁶

1. Media as a site of differentiation

In this chapter, I paint a broad portrait of the True Love Waits phenomenon and locate it in the contemporary situation, particularly with respect to the interdependence of religion and the media. As Stewart Hoover has observed, “reminiscent of similar valences in media scholarship, religion scholars now find themselves looking to the ‘audience,’ (religious practice) rather than at the ‘purveyors of texts’ (religious institutions)” (Hoover, 1995). As such, rather than to assess the True Love Waits campaign in his institutional historical context within certain trends in American religious history, in this case study, I seek to accomplish a somewhat different, three-fold task: first, to interpret the campaign as a means of selling a complete identity, both individual and collective; second, to consider the campaign as representative of popular American Protestantism; and third, to reflect on the campaign as a marketing strategy, one with targets, niches, and messages.

²⁶ I am indebted to Julie Ingersoll and Diana Butler for pointing out the parallels between the True Love Waits sexual purity pledge and the WCTU temperance pledge.

2. Selling a differentiated identity: target, context, and message

A single metaphor drives this descriptive enterprise: selling identity. This is an expansion of the title metaphor of R. Laurence Moore's book, *Selling God*, which he describes as "a study of religious influence in determining the taste of people who were learning to purchase 'culture' as a means of self-improvement and relaxation" (Moore, 1994). I suggest, the True Love Waits campaign is an attempt to market not culture, nor self-improvement and relaxation, but rather, an entire way of being in the world, and of indicating one's relationship to the world in which one lives. As Hoover has noted, "articulated into the dominant modes of the broader culture, religious choice now emphasizes...meaning. While the psychological motivations for belonging need not necessarily have changed, belonging can now be expressed in different ways" (Hoover, 1995, p. 14). Insofar as the question of identity involves the cultural—and therefore media-influenced—production of meaning, this study will resemble something of a market research analysis. I focus on three central issues: the targets of the campaign, whether they are in the evangelical community or in society at large, the message it promotes, and the context within which it operates. In other words, to whom is it trying to sell its product (whether in the conservative Protestant subculture or in the wider secular world), what product is True Love Waits selling, and what market segment does it occupy?

Knowing the target audience will provide a reference point in relation with which to place the message and context of the campaign. The target membership of the True Love Waits campaign is not American teenagers in general, but rather

“churched” teenagers already within the conservative Protestant fold. As Wayne Elzey points out, “the real target has always been precisely the people who attended regularly, the urban, middle-class Protestants.... [Those not already within the fold] were to be thought about, and not to be converted” (Elzey, 1975, p. 753). The wording of the “Sample News Release” provided in the “True Love Waits Emphasis Planning Kit,” which is sent to group leaders who wish to start a local campaign, is intended to “coincide with planned church True Love Waits...celebration event[s].” The news release is to be distributed to all community media outlets, secular and religious:

The purpose of the emphasis is to inspire, inform, and call youth to adhere to the biblical mandate from God and commit to refraining from sex before marriage, (pastor’s name) said. (Pastor’s name) said over (number) teenagers have signed commitment cards promising to abstain from sex from now until marriage.

The message transmitted here is not intended to bring outsiders in, but rather to gather in unregenerate church members and to demonstrate to the wider world the strength and integrity of the movement. The extent to which the community media might completely ignore these events would also highlight the power of the movement to persevere in the face of social stigma; as Elzey puts it, “continued failure is the only sure mark of success” (Elzey, 1975, p. 752).

The True Love Waits campaign cites statistical evidence in its “For Your Information” fact sheet, in order to provide a contextual justification for the campaign; the nature of the statistical evidence, however, demonstrates that the campaign’s target is churched youth, not the wider world. The planning kit

documents a continuing decline of morality among America's youth (particularly Christian youth), such that a new movement is needed, one that will elevate these falling moral standards. Investigations undertaken in the early 1980s by sociologist James Davison Hunter and in the mid-1990s by youth minister Josh McDowell bear out this argument. According to their research, sexual activity among "churched" youth increased from the 1960s to the 1980s, and then soared to a peak in 1987. Since 1987, although the proportion of sexually active "churched" youth has declined, so has the proportion believing pre-marital sexual contact, including intercourse, is "always morally wrong." In other words, fewer people are having premarital sex, but not because they believe it is wrong. This suggests to authors such as McDowell that young people have lost their moral compass. The True Love Waits campaign, thus, concentrates on chastity in the individual while cultivating a stronger sense of moral commitment and solidarity within the church community (see Hunter, 1983, McDowell & Hostetler, 1994).

The True Love Waits campaign's market niche is located within what Wayne Elzey has called "popular American Protestantism" (Elzey, 1975, p. 43). Within this rubric Elzey includes a number of characteristic traits: a) an extra-ecclesiastical community, b) a developed iconographic and artifactual tradition, c) a highly personalized conception of the object of religion, d) a primary concern with the individual, rather than with the group, the society, or the nation, e) the objective of establishing and maintaining a devotional or "Bhaktic" relationship between the believer and the object of worship, f) a dualistic view of the world, g) the tendency to

express “doctrines” by means of concrete images and symbols rather than in abstract language and systematic theologies, h) the sacralization of the ordinary and commonplace, i) conversely, the de-emphasis of traditionally “sacred” texts, institutions, and actions, and j) the ritualization of moral behavior.

The portrait of True Love Waits presented here will take up each of these traits in turn, relating it to the three central issues of target, context, and message. It is worth noting at the outset that this understanding of “popular Protestantism” lends itself particularly well to an analysis of how it is influenced by the media and by media practices, for at least three important reasons. First, insofar as it is “extra-ecclesiastical,” this mode of Protestantism does not need to rely on congregational models of organization and recruitment—it can reach out over the airwaves and through the television to reach youth where they are. Second, the media are nothing if not “iconographic,” relying on “concrete images and symbols”; Hoover points out the extent to which scholars ought to investigate “the construction of religious culture out of a universe of symbols,... [which] result in legitimate, substantive constructions” of cultural practice (Hoover, 1995, p. 4). Third, popular Protestantism leverages an individual, devotional relationship predicated on the “sacralization of the ordinary” through rituals of communication and practice that literally are mediated by television and music-related products and programming, the kind that can be enacted simply by jogging with a personal headset or turning on a videocassette recorder.

Let us now take up Elzey’s categories of popular Protestantism. The campaign is *extra-ecclesiastical* in that it is sponsored by a coalition of evangelical,

fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and holiness groups, and does not claim to replace any of them as a “church.” Rather, it seeks to supplement existing teen ministry programs. To the limited extent that the campaign is moving beyond the evangelical sub-culture into the so-called wider world, the campaign keeps to a minimum the kinds of brand-name references that would tag it as of interest only to a particular group, but nonetheless retains its strongly conservative Protestant tone. Another interpretation of the absence of brand-name references might locate it within the general media practice of appealing to the lowest common denominator, insofar as generalizations will attract the broadest possible response.

True Love Waits has developed a powerful *iconographic and artifactual tradition*, which has led to the commodification not of sex, but of abstinence (see Turner, 2012, pp. 150-153). Hoover writes of “an active, sentient audience,...[one which] can be said to act in ways that involve choice, appropriation, and re-integration of content” (Hoover, 1995, p. 5.) Teenagers are nothing if not active audiences. For them, image is everything, and the “True Love Waits Emphasis Planning Kit” includes a number of related materials that may be purchased: in addition to TLW logos that may be photocopied or made into stickers and buttons. The planning kit provides ordering information for caps, commitment rings, compact discs and cassettes, banners and posters, mugs and plates, and, not to be outdone by the secular fashion industry, “True Love Waits Active Wear,” including t-shirts and sweatshirts. One of the most compelling aspects of the True Love Waits logo is that in the contemporary marketplace of clothing, where a wide variety of initials and

messages is imprinted on shirts and sweaters, the True Love Waits logo is not immediately recognizable to outsiders. At the same time, however, the True Love Waits identity is instantly communicated to those “in the know.” This phenomenon echoes the “ΙΧΘΟΣ” insignia of the early Church and visually establishes a sense of solidarity—and hence community identity—among its wearers. It is precisely this kind of mediated commodification to which Hoover refers when he writes, “We know who we are by our practices of textual consumption [here literally the wearing of letters], and media texts now serve as important maps through which we see ourselves on local and global landscapes” (Hoover, 1995, p. 5).

Thus, the campaign uses *concrete images and symbols*, such as the covenant card and the TLW logo, to convey its message. The duplicating instructions included in the planning kit suggest that “the quality of the card reflect the depth of the commitment being made” and include ordering information for acrylic holders to preserve the cards after they have been signed. Furthermore, the order form for the commitment ring (which costs \$29.00) indicates:

A gold ring is a symbol of the “True Love Waits” commitment. The ring is a daily reminder of the vow and serves also as a witnessing tool. It is suggested that the ring be worn until marriage and given to the marriage partner on the wedding night as their gift of purity.

The True Love Waits planning kit’s list of “Church Worship Ideas” further notes the ring “can also provide opportunities to teenagers to share their commitment to abstinence with their peers when asked about the ring”—in other words, it becomes a concrete, material witnessing tool.

The message of the True Love Waits campaign promotes a *highly personalized conception of the object of religion* and seeks to establish and maintain a *devotional relationship between the believer and the object of worship*. Teenagers involved in the True Love Waits campaign believe God (in the conservative Protestant tradition this is a highly personal, involved, authoritative father figure) wants them to remain “sexually pure” not only for the sake of their future mate but also for His sake. Furthermore, the campaign is concerned primarily with the individual promise-maker, rather than with any larger social group. All it asks of the believer is that he or she take a vow of chastity until marriage. The campaign pursues no larger social or political goals; it has even stayed out of the sex education controversy in public schools. When True Love Waits held a rally—a “stake-out” of over 211,000 “covenant cards” (as the signed pledge cards are called)—on the Mall in Washington, DC, on July 29, 1994, it appeared only to seek to demonstrate the sheer number of young people who had taken the pledge and, at most, to document a “cultural trend,” not to make any larger social statement (Willis, 1994).

The campaign articulates a *dualistic view of the world*. Pre-marital sexual intercourse constitutes an expression of “false love” (*True Love Waits Church Worship Ideas*, p. 1); “true” love requires sexual “purity,” defined as chastity before marriage and selfless sexual union within marriage. In his book *Innocent Ecstasy*, Peter Gardella relates how Joshua McDowell, the popular Christian educator cited earlier, develops the notion of “maximum sex,” the idea that sexuality expressed within marriage offers the greatest opportunity for spiritual and physical pleasure

(Gardella, 1985). Indeed, one of the basic messages of the True Love Waits campaign is that sex is more pleasurable if each partner abstains until marriage. As Elzey observes, “opposing and contrary beliefs and symbols are held together...by the fact that each finds the existence of the other to be necessary to its own existence” (Elzey, 1995, p. 746). Thus, within the context of the True Love Waits campaign, the spiritual and physical pleasure found in sexual relations is actually created through the process of chastity and abstinence—in Gardella’s phrase, the ecstasy derives from the innocence. Conversely, pre-marital promiscuity robs young people of true sexual pleasure, through sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and the social stigma associated with sexual impurity.

3. Competition or Co-optation?

Gardella’s notion of “innocent ecstasy” itself illustrates the dualistic notions that drive popular movements like True Love Waits: by channeling “impure” desires and expressions into “pure” venues such as prayer and, more importantly, “Biblical marriage relationships,” campaigns such as True Love Waits offer a bridge for living a pure, Godly life in an impure, human, body. One way of doing so is to combine the Christian message with the “innocently ecstatic” medium of popular contemporary music. The planning kit includes sheet music for two songs to be used at home and in church, “This Promise I Made” and the “True Love Waits Anthem.” Furthermore, the True Love Waits compact disc/cassette includes such popular artists as Grammy award-winners DC Talk and Petra, as well as Newsboys and Lisa Bevill, all of whom

are superstars in the conservative Protestant sub-culture. Many of the songs, if pure in their message, are frankly sexual in their backbeat and texture, illustrating Wayne Elzey's observation that "the erotic *techniques* of salvation ought to be as obvious as the content of the sermon which equates eroticism and sin. Neither can be understood apart from the other. Conversion involves eliciting 'sinful' attitudes, which save people from their 'sins'" (Elzey, 1975, p. 750). For example, a popular title on both True Love Waits albums, by the Grammy award-winning rap group DC Talk, is entitled "I Don't Want Your Sex." The song is clearly a reaction to, and inversion of, George Michael's secular hit single, "I Want Your Sex"; as much as, if not more than, the George Michael hit, this DC Talk single is driven by a pulsing, throbbing backbeat—even if the message is chaste, the medium certainly is not. The True Love Waits audio products, thus, seek to re-channel normal, human, erotic desires into a purely Christian outlet; such physical pleasure becomes a means toward a spiritual end.

Simply because the campaign encourages its members to remain sexually pure, however, does not mean that it excludes sexually active teenagers. In fact, the campaign specifically targets these teenagers by placing the emphasis of the campaign not on virginity, but rather on chastity. The campaign creates a category of "secondary virginity" that allows—indeed, welcomes—young people who have been sexually active to alter their behavior. Focusing on "acquired" purity over "original" purity not only places the campaign firmly within a Protestant tradition that emphasizes conversion experience over inherited religious affiliation, but also

reiterates the campaign's overall message that sexual purity is achieved only through a personal relationship with God and with one's future spouse, and it does not just "happen." Christian sex-education books aimed at teenagers often make this point quite strongly; Greg Johnson and Susie Shellenberger put it this way:

Maybe you...have already blown it. God is willing to forgive and forget. So what is your responsibility? To seek His forgiveness. And to start over...."

Isaiah 43:19 says, "I'm going to do a brand new thing!" (TLB). And that's exactly what He wants to do in your life. It's called a "second virginity." If you've had sex, you're no longer a virgin. But God wants to forgive and forget, remember? In other words, He wants to wipe your slate completely clean—as if you'd never blown it!

What a wonderful and powerful God, huh? Therefore, through His forgiveness and cleansing, you can claim a "second virginity." In His eyes—because He's blotted out your past—you're starting all over, a virgin! (Johnson & Shellenberger, 1994)

This passage demonstrates a number of popular Protestant traits, such as an intensely personal relationship between God and the believer, one which is dependent on the believer's continued devotion to God (the "responsibility...to seek His forgiveness"), and a dualistic worldview: "Either you're in with God, or you're not. It's your choice." Furthermore, the passage, as well as the True Love Waits campaign as a whole, not only *de-emphasizes traditionally "sacred" actions*, insofar as it presents sexuality as having been commodified and devalued by the secular consumer culture. It also *sacralizes the ordinary*, that is, it renders sacred the act of admitting to and repenting for premarital sexual activity.²⁷ The sacred and the ordinary are again

²⁷ Confession and repentance of specific sins is a well documented religious activity—indeed, it is a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church. However, ritualized confession and

inverted when the positive decision to remain chaste—in the form of the True Love Waits pledge—is elevated to a position of importance. A decision not to have sex, even if one has already been sexually active, becomes a sacred act; conversely, admitting and repenting sexual impurity simply removes it from the divine tally sheet.

One consequence of elevating sexual purity to such a high level, however, is that it raises the question of when purity ends and impurity begins. This is an especially difficult question with regard to masturbation, which the Church has traditionally opposed strongly but which one might reasonably expect to be preferable to sexual intercourse. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, declares masturbation to be “an intrinsically and gravely disordered action. The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995, III:2:1:6, p. 2352). By contrast, conservative Protestant educators Bill Ameiss and Jane Graver counsel, “Infrequent self-stimulation provides a release of sexual tension and should not be a cause for concern or shame.” They caution, however, against using masturbation to compensate for loneliness and against fantasizing about using another person as a “toy made for your sexual pleasure” (Ameiss & Graver, 1995). Perhaps purposefully vaguer than either of these two other positions, Johnson and Shellenberger point out that “to be sexually fulfilled by someone other than your husband/wife is wrong in

repentance has not been the norm in conservative Protestant settings, though it may be growing in popularity. Thus, this is an example of sacralizing the (normally) ordinary.

God's eyes" (Johnson & Shellenberger, 1994, p. 192); they do not indicate, however, whether masturbation falls into this category.

How is the question of masturbation linked to the influence of the media on the True Love Waits campaign? Just as media practices seek to appeal to the broadest common audience possible, and focus on opportunities rather than limitations, so here does the True Love Waits campaign perhaps purposefully keep its commentary on masturbation vague: it is not directly related to the central message of the campaign (i.e., abstinence from premarital sexual intercourse), the different denominations supporting the campaign have different views on the matter, and most importantly, raising the issue would point to the kinds of restrictions on young people that ultimately might be imposed by the True Love Waits regime.

Wayne Elzey's last category concerns the ritualization of moral behavior. Indeed, the True Love Waits campaign appears to have a ritual for nearly every action. The planning kit includes "Family Worship Ideas" and "Church Worship Ideas," both of which contain suggestions for incorporating into the formal liturgy a ritual for taking the sexual purity vows, and for re-affirming those vows on a regular basis. In the case of church worship, this is done in call-and-response form to ensure the support and participation of the entire congregation. One element of the ritual is a "ring ceremony," during which the teenager receives the commitment ring "as a constant reminder of the commitment made." Johnson and Shellenberger, in a book entitled *258 Great Dates While You Wait*, describe one family's ring ceremony, which takes place on the occasion of the young woman's thirteenth birthday, itself a

ritual occasion of passage into the teenage years. “Someday when I’m out with a guy and he reaches for my hand,” the authors quote Shauna Menefee as telling them:

I’m going to feel my ring against his flesh. That’s a pretty powerful reminder of my commitment. And even now, when I catch myself daydreaming in class, I start fiddling with my ring—you know, twisting it round and round. And I smile deep inside, knowing that someday I’ll present this very ring to my husband on our wedding night as a symbol of the most important gift I can give him—my virginity. (Johnson & Shellenberger, 1995)

This statement not only captures the power of materiality in the True Love Waits campaign, but also illustrates the extent to which *ordinary activities*—holding hands and daydreaming in class—are *sacralized* (in ways that are unique to signers of the pledge) to become opportunities for a ritual of memory and commitment.

4. Marketing difference

The way the True Love Waits campaign has employed these characteristics of popular Protestantism indicates the extent to which the campaign is not just selling chastity, but rather marketing an entire identity. Indeed, playwrights Kathie Hill and Travis Cottrell have expanded the concept of waiting for marriage and sexuality to include an entire identity constructed on “waiting on the Lord.” The True Love Waits planning kit promotes their play, entitled *Waiters: A Youth Musical About Waiting on the Lord*; with a pun on the meaning of the word “waiters,” the play is set in a trendy restaurant called Masterson’s (an allusion to the church life with the Master’s Son, Jesus Christ). The play promotes “wait training,” an “acquired Christian discipline” to be “appl[ied] to our lives.” The waiter should be “punctual” but “patient”; he or she should seek to know God’s “purpose” and “plan,” and acknowledge God’s

“presence.” The only thing for which one should not wait is “making Jesus Savior and Lord”: this is a “priority,” and waiters should learn to be “sensitive to the *prodding* of the Holy Spirit”; finally, true waiters “know the product of waiting is service to others” (Hill & Cottrell, 1994).

All of this indicates the extent to which “religious experience is effectively integrated into the practices of the self which typify the media age” (Hoover, 1995, p. 13)—and, thus, contribute to the social construction of a culturally distinct identity. Difficult though the regimen prescribed by Hill and Cottrell may be to keep, the spiritual rewards (salvation) and material rewards (sexual pleasure in marriage—and in the context of the play, college scholarships) are generous. Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke might characterize the True Love Waits campaign as a “high cost-high reward” movement; such movements, they argue in *The Churching of America* (1992), have been the most successful in attracting and retaining members.

Sectarian members are either in or out; they must follow the demands of the group or withdraw. The “seductive middle-ground” is lost. For those who do join, high costs increase their level of involvement because it makes activities outside of the group more costly. The flow of rewards for displaying high levels of commitment has been substantially increased. The higher the costs of membership, the greater the material and social, as well as religious, benefits of membership (see Finke & Stark, 1992). This is clearly evident in the sense of identity and community cultivated by the True Love Waits campaign: in the secular world where sexuality has been commodified, and virginity devalued, if not ridiculed, taking a vow of chastity is a

high-cost either-or proposition. “Seductive” though it may be, there is no middle ground. As a result of making this commitment, however, teen believers may feel uncomfortable in the “wider world” for at least two reasons: not only might they be teased mercilessly for “wimping out” on sex, but they also might find the sexual temptations (which are apparent everywhere, from prime-time sitcoms to public billboards) too overwhelming to resist. Thus, they would seek a home within the church community, and more specifically, the youth community as defined to include others who have taken the chastity vow; the church community, in turn, provides social, material, and religious rewards for the teens’ loyalty.

This chapter has used the case of the True Love Waits campaign to illustrate the conceptual site of differentiation and to show how it can make use of and be embedded in institutions of the media—“the ‘consciousness industries’—and their cultural commodities,” as Hoover puts it. “This situation is further enforced by the decline of other contexts of religious-institutional authority” (Hoover, 1995, p. 13).

In addition to using a similar methodology—literature analysis—this case study shares with the previous case study on *mizuko kuyo* a way of illuminating Turner’s claim:

religion has joined modernity insofar as religious lifestyles are modeled on secular lifestyles that are promoted through a vast array of advertising strategies, growth consultancies, and financial inducements. These lifestyles circulate in religious markets that sell general spiritual rather than specific ecclesiastical services. (Turner, 2012, p. 138)

The two cases also share a focus on institutional élites as producers of meaning (however contested) but also a focus on ideological differentiation, whether via pre-

war views of motherhood, on the one hand, or chastity, on the other (see Calhoun, 2012, p. 342) to connect and cohere the religious field. While the post-secular moment certainly has its own contested ideological elements, religious identification and expression are, of course, multi-dimensional (see Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011, pp. 18-19 for a caution about the use of “post-secular” to begin with). Thus, over the course of the next chapters, we will shift focus not only methodologically, to ethnographic field research, but also to cases that move beyond questions of ideology to concerns about belonging.

By way of a coda on True Love Waits, however, I want to take up what news media call “the tragic consequences of teen-age pregnancy”: journalist Mark Silk observes in *Unsecular Media* that this “age-old topos of fallen maidenhood” has been transformed into a secular, psychologized social misfortune: “where once religion might have been proffered as the means for averting the tragedy, now it is professional medical help (available at state expense)” (Silk, 1995). As I opened the case study by commenting about how the True Love Waits campaign appropriates media methods for religious ends—a tried-and-true strategy for American evangelical groups—I conclude by reiterating the extent to which those media methods have the effect of marketing differentiated, custom-tailored identities. Where the religious reaction to the situation Silk describes might once have been to use fear tactics in the hopes of keeping young people “scared chaste,” instead True Love Waits has employed the time- and media-tested psychosocial techniques of collective identity construction—through commodification and eroticization—in order to sell sexual

purity. At its core, the goal may be the same—but this is one case where the medium is not the message.

FIVE. INTERSTITIAL RELIGION AFTER SECULARIZATION: CENTRAL EUROPEAN JEWS AFTER STATE SOCIALISM

Some of the greatest challenges in the social scientific study of religion after secularization are examinations of religious identity among individuals who, at first glance at least, appear to be entirely secularized. Indeed, Lynn Davidman (2006; Cadge & Davidman, 2006) argues that such highly secularized people offer a powerful test case within which to explore issues of religious identity, specifically questions of ascription and achievement (Davidman, 2006, pp. 52-53). It seems appropriate, therefore, to consider a test case focusing on recognition—the “shared script” through which people actively define themselves through the articulation of a particular way of being in the world—with which I can explore the questions of discursive identity and social networking that I argue form the basis for a new understanding of religion in the interstitial middle ground.

The case at issue here, an ethnographic look at the way postsocialist Slovak Jews contended with their Slovak and Jewish identities through communal solidarity and shared social practices, raises important issues related to the situational definition of religion as well as the positionality of the researcher. Unlike other case studies, in which religiousness has a transcendental or divine referent, in this particular situation, the content of “Jewishness” at first seems primarily secular: communal solidarity and shared social practices. This not only undermines sharp distinctions between the religious and the secular (whether observed in the field or made by the scholar) but also challenges the observer to attend carefully to the implications of his or her own

interpretations, lest they reify a conceptual separation that may not be experienced in lived conditions. The application of a Jewish setting raises questions about anthropological theories and assumptions and in which the use of ethnographic methods provides new insights into interstitial Judaism itself. However, the fieldwork also raised significant issues related to my position as a researcher (among other identity markers, one of Slovak Jewish origin), issues not directly addressed in this chapter but taken up later in Chapter Eight.

1. Jewish studies, social anthropology, and the challenge of the normative

The social anthropological study of Jews and Judaism—addressed in this chapter and again in my examination of a Jewish seeker service in Los Angeles, California (see Chapter Seven), poses distinct challenges to the field of religious studies, not only because of complications with respect to the definition of Judaism, but also because of the absence of a clear disciplinary lineage or discourse. Within the “anthropology of Judaism,” there is neither a core body of texts to which to refer nor anything remotely resembling an agreed-upon canon. It consists not so much as a range of materials across a recognizable spectrum but rather as an agglomeration of books and articles that may be arranged roughly into the following main areas:

- sociological and anthropological studies that take Israeli society (and with it, Jews) as their object of study;
 - Within this category, I include the considerable number of works addressing Ethiopian Jews—before, during and after they immigrated

en masse to Israel in 1985.

- “Jewish studies” texts that attempt to apply anthropological methods;
- attempts by sociologists and anthropologists to interpret the Bible;
- ethnographic studies and analyses of Jewish communities; and
- articles about the difficulties of thinking anthropologically or sociologically about Jews (said articles usually written by Jewish anthropologists and sociologists)

Rather than attempt a catchall assessment of the “anthropology of Judaism” here, I shall work through some specific articles of the kind described above. One caveat: this discussion covers neither: (a) sociological and anthropological studies that take Israeli society (and with it, Jews) as their object of study, nor (b) attempts by sociologists and anthropologists to interpret the Bible. I do this partly for considerations of space, but also for other reasons. With regard to the former category, a brief overview reveals that for most of these studies, the idea of “Judaism” or “Jewishness” is not a key question; the communities and informants just happen to be Jewish. This is not to say that such work is not valuable. Walter Zenner’s “Syrian Jews in New York twenty years ago” (1983), an excellent ethnography of a community in Brooklyn, highlights critical differences between Syrian Jews and the far more numerous Eastern European Jews. The latter category, the “anthropology of the Bible,” I consider a separate category, with its own intellectual genealogy, from W. R. Smith to Douglas and Eilberg-Schwartz, different from the anthropology of Judaism, a term that I understand to refer to the anthropology of (post-Temple)

Judaism (as it is lived and experienced).

“Jewish studies” texts that attempt to apply anthropological methods

As Jacques Gutwirth acknowledges in a review essay on books about anthropology, ethnography, and Judaism, “with few exceptions, the ethnologist of Judaism is Jewish” (Gutwirth, 1991, p. 139). Many studies that fall under the “anthropology of Judaism” rubric are part of the “Jewish Studies canon” and do more to “illuminate Jewish experience” than to enlarge the scope of anthropological knowledge (Cutter, 1996, pp. 172-173). “The social and political needs of the American [Jewish] community have stimulated sociological studies,” William Cutter notes (p. 161); this statement encapsulates the rather denominational provincialism of the social-scientific study of Jews. Moreover, the Jewish Studies approach tends to involve a normative preference for “strong” Jews rather than “weak” Jews, that is, Jews who are actively engaged in the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of their individual and collective identities as Jews, rather than Jews who, beyond even passive engagement, may be ambivalent about or ignorant of those identities. As Charmé (1996, p. 215) appears to suggest, even when such studies recognize that there is more to Jewish identity than religious observance and acknowledge that “the qualitative, ethnographic approach may offer a way to avoid hierarchical models that divide Jews into those at the center or at the core, and those on the margins, or distinguish the ‘more Jewish’ from the ‘less Jewish.’” The real objective of these studies appears to be the preservation of a recognizable and coherent “Jewish

community.”

Even when the approach is more theoretical than practical, it appears to be driven by a sense of the normative. Jonathan Boyarin, for example, asserts that Jewish anthropologists of Judaism are motivated by “the consciousness of a loss, that of an idealized community” (quoted in Gutwirth, p. 140). Boyarin, who is trained both in anthropology and in Judaica, has applied the ethnographic method to the traditional reading and study practices of orthodox Jews (1991, 1993). While his work on the ethnography of memory (1992) has undoubtedly influenced anthropologists working in other fields, his approach, which draws liberally upon literary theory and historiography, expands the ways in which Judaism may be approached, and has done a great deal to shape the arena of Jewish Studies.

Ethnographic studies and analyses of Jewish communities

Gutwirth takes issue with Boyarin’s sense of the ideal, and argues that a variety of motives drive the anthropology of Judaism (Gutwirth, p. 140). He suggests that anthropology is more able than other social sciences to take the measure of Judaism’s *lived* (rather than ideal) diverse cultures—in Brooklyn, for example, from Boro Park Hasidim to Brighton Beach ex-Soviet immigrants—within the wider context of urban modernity. What Gutwirth does not explore however, is the extent to which the kind of approach he advocates is not simply descriptive or even explanatory, but rather transformative—in that it requires the researcher and the reader to reconsider both the techniques of anthropology and the “stuff” of Judaism.

These studies include Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's seminal *Life is with people: The culture of the shtetl*, Samuel C. Heilman's congregational studies of American orthodox Jewish life and learning, and Barbara Myerhoff's classic *Number our days*. In these studies—particularly in Myerhoff's work—content (Jewish life) and form (the ethnographic approach) are blended together so as to be nearly inseparable from one another. Myerhoff, for example, develops an understanding of categories of “visibility” and “invisibility” that cannot be understood apart from the setting in which they are meaningful, a Jewish senior citizens center in Venice, California (see also Myerhoff, 1987).

Susan Starr Sered's “Food and holiness: Cooking as a sacred act among Middle-Eastern Jewish women” (1988) is an excellent example of this genre. “The aim of the work,” as she put it, “was to understand the meaning of religion for illiterate women whose religious life is situated within a literate and male-oriented ‘great tradition’” (p. 129). Her study involved approximately 100 elderly women attending a Jerusalem senior citizens center; she wanted to know how a group traditionally marginal within its religion makes sense of its experience. Sered finds that the women she studied see “Jewish identity, tradition, law, and holidays in terms of feeding others. Through feeding others in the proper way, the correct networks of human to human and human to divine relationship are maintained and strengthened” (p. 131). “Cooking is a sacred activity because it embodies, concretizes, dramatizes, and ritualizes a number of the central elements of Judaism, as understood by the women themselves” (p. 136). Throughout the article, Sered locates her own

ethnographic findings within the broader context of similar anthropological studies of other cultures, and is, therefore, able not only to reconsider the varieties of Jewish experience—“while men *celebrate* or *observe* the Sabbath and holidays, women *make* or *prepare* the holy days” (p. 135)—but also the range of anthropological theory about religion—“the notion that the sacred may be fully embedded in everyday domestic life leads to a major re-thinking of how to go about studying religiosity” (p. 137).

Articles about the difficulties of thinking anthropologically or sociologically about Jews (usually written by Jewish anthropologists and sociologists)

Not surprisingly, a number of articles have appeared describing the trials and tribulations of writing about Jews. These range from the methodological (Gross, 1993) to the autobiographical and reflexive (Shaffir, 1985). Review essays such as those cited above (Charmé, 1996; Gutwirth, 1991; see also Webber, 1988) also offer an opportunity for comment. These articles share three main themes. First, they address the problem of access, asking not simply *who* the Jews are and *how* to count them, but also *where* to find them and *how* to gain entry. Discussing the case of Polish Jews, Jonathan Webber notes that “there is no good reason to suppose in advance that “minorities” or “nationalities” ...are in fact bounded, and that they must by definition generate their own self-contained ethnographic—or demographic—realities” (Webber, 1988, p. 53). Second, there is the relationship between method and outcome. In his preamble to a review of quantitative analyses, Gross notes that the assumption of an “organic paradigm” of Jewish ethnicity will yield a very

different outcome than the assumption of an “organizational paradigm,” and thus will lead to very different policy proposals (Gross, 1993, pp. 5-8). From a qualitative perspective, Shaffir considers the effect of honesty and deception in his “presentation of self” as an ethnographer on his ability to glean accurate information from his Hasidic informants. Third, one must consider the context within which the research takes place—this is not simply a question of boundaries between “inside” and “outside” but rather the problem of autonomy and interaction. Gutwirth identifies “urban ethnography” as the “fieldwork method of studying Hassidic groups,” because “the group and its individual members always exist within wider entities” (Gutwirth, 1978, p. 50). He argues that sociological surveys “sometimes fail to reveal important trends and interactions between various sectors of the population they survey” and notes that the ambivalence toward assimilation and cultural interaction that he observed in the Boston Hassidic community did not appear in the survey data, but only as a result of his “intensive fieldwork” (Gutwirth, 1978, p. 57).

What is striking about these three themes—access, the method-outcome relationship, and context—is that they are some of the central dilemmas of social anthropology in general. While I do not imagine that any of the authors cited above would claim that their challenges are unique to the “anthropology of Judaism”—and indeed their bibliographies include some (but not many) references to general theoretical sociological and anthropological literature—none of them draw ethnographic comparisons with the efforts of other field workers in a way analogous to Sered’s careful comparisons of food preparation by Jewish women and by women

of other cultures.

In something of a contrast to the examples cited above are studies of the kind exemplified by Jonathan Webber's introduction to *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, Harvey Goldberg's introduction to *Judaism viewed from within and without: Anthropological studies* and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's conclusion to *The savage in Judaism*. These are more reflective essays that attempt to engage anthropology and Judaism in a dynamic relationship with one another. Webber's introduction falls into the "Jewish studies" category, within which the anthropological approach is but one among others (including sociological, historical, and literary methods). What distinguishes Webber's strategy is that rather than assume a single cohesive Judaism as normative, and rather than complain about various fieldwork dilemmas, Webber tackles head-on the problem of multiple "Jewish identities," and questions whether indeed European Jews have "any common history at all" (Webber, 1994, p. 6). By turning on its head the standard "Jewish studies" assumption—that of a single "Jewry"—, he opens up that discipline (or set of disciplines) to rigorous social-scientific interpretation by the other contributors in the book. Harvey Goldberg attempts much the same thing in his introduction to *Judaism viewed from within and without*. However, where Webber's inquiries are tactical and methodological, Goldberg's are strategic and theoretical; thus, his "Reflections on the mutual relevance of anthropology and Judaic studies" take up more space addressing separately the anthropology of religion, on the one hand, and Jewish studies, on the other. Although Goldberg's discussion of the general anthropology of religion is more

developed than any similar descriptions elsewhere, his specific application to Judaism is somewhat limited to the ritual enactment of texts (Goldberg, 1987, pp. 28-32. Such an approach leaves little room for innovations such as Sered's, which challenge the dominance of the text. Finally, Eilberg-Schwartz argues that the "anthropology of Judaism" is theoretically (and politically) revolutionary, insofar as it renders "no longer tolerable" the long-held attitude "that different kinds of discourses be reserved for different religious traditions. The allocation of some traditions to anthropology and others to history or religious studies is simply a survival of earlier prejudices that once sorted traditions into the categories of savagery and civilization" (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990, p. 236). Moreover, applying anthropology to Judaism exposes Judaism to a wide range of inquiries; "an understanding of Judaism as a religious culture necessitates cultivating sensitivities that can only be developed through exposure to a variety of cultures in a wide range of contexts" (p. 238). By way of example, he cites the work of Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer and Lévi-Strauss on ritual as instrumental in pointing him to certain interpretations of Biblical Jewish practices that he might otherwise have missed. Eilberg-Schwartz further notes that insofar as the application of anthropology to Judaism forces one's gaze to shift from "the book" to "the body," it constitutes a "savage critique" of the last two centuries' study of Judaism as "high culture" (p. 239). Eilberg-Schwartz's treatment of anthropology and of Judaism is perhaps the least orthodox of its reflexive genre, just as Sered's ethnography of illiterate Jewish women is the least orthodox of its ethnographic genre—and to my mind, they are the most effective in joining the two realms.

2. Reconsidering the religious in a secularized context

It is perhaps only slightly unfair to characterize the “social anthropology of Judaism” as (mostly) comprising social anthropological studies that just happen to have Jews as their subject alongside “Jewish studies” texts that just happen to use a social anthropological approach. More challenging are studies in which the application of a Jewish setting raises questions about anthropological theories and assumptions and in which the use of the ethnographic methods provides new insights into the nature of interstitial Judaism itself. It is for this reason that we turn now to the interplay among religious, ethno-cultural, and national identities in the Jewish community of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Unlike the previous case studies, in which religiousness has a transcendental or divine referent, in this particular situation, the content of “Jewishness” at first seems primarily secular: as noted earlier, it appears through communal solidarity and shared social practices. As Craig Calhoun notes, this not only undermines sharp distinctions between the religious and the secular but also challenges the observer to attend carefully to the implications of his or her own interpretations, lest they reify a conceptual separation that may not be experienced in lived conditions:

Being Muslim, being Christian, being Hindu, being Jewish are mobilized as secular identities, like ethnic identities. People who don’t practice the religion in any active way sometimes claim religious identities as secular markers....

... In general, it is unclear how much we can separate religion from culture, ethnicity, national identity, or a variety of other concepts constructed in secular terms. Or, put another way, how “the secular” is constructed shapes not only how religion is conceptualized but how culture more generally is understood.” (2012, pp. 351, 352)

Calhoun's point, though perhaps intuitive, is a caution to which I will return in my discussions of representation in Chapter Eight. Thus, examination of post-Holocaust, post-communist religious identity in the East-Central European context offers insights into the ongoing theoretical and practical discussions about the nature of religious engagement in a secular context.

Among the Jews of Banská Bystrica, the social practices of Jewish identity are of anthropological interest because they produce particular kinds of personhood (e.g., "Jewish," "Slovak") and social bonds (e.g., the "Jewish community," the "Slovak nation") that simultaneously effect a "civil society."

It is hardly new to say that Jews in Banská Bystrica are ambivalent about being simultaneously Slovak and Jewish. The same could be (and is, often) said of Jews in Poland, Russia, Germany, France, England and America. Less frequently addressed are the consequences of that ambivalence. Having established that there is a tension between "being Jewish" and "being Slovak," it is perhaps useful to investigate the significance of that tension. The ambivalence over being "Jewish" and being "Slovak" is concerned primarily with the conflicting (or complementary, depending on one's perspective) *meanings* of being "Jewish" and "Slovak." In this chapter, therefore, my objective is to explore how Jews in Banská Bystrica create and re-create their ideas about being Jewish and Slovak.

The question of religious identity is especially important in the emerging democratic societies of East-Central Europe (Tomka, 1994, pp. 379-380), and there is a steadily growing body of academic and journalistic work on the renascent Jewish

communities of East-Central Europe. While little anthropological work has focused specifically on religion, current research in Central European sociology of religion has addressed church-state issues and proselytizing by new religious movements, mostly those from within American evangelical Christianity, but also Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (Tomka, 1994, p. 386). With respect to Jews and Jewish communities in particular, a veritable flood of work on "memory" and "representation" began to pour forth during the 1990s, primarily work on the Nazi Holocaust, as well as studies on the general phenomenon of anti-Semitism (see Branham, 1994). Beginning in the late 1990s, a number of books and articles appeared concerning Central European Jewish communities (see, for example, Buruma, 1997; Giorgi & Pohoryles, 1996; Goldstein, 1997; Gruber, 1996; Kugelmass, 1995, 1996).

Existing literature such as Zvi Gitelman and Sascha Goluboff's research in Russia, Vital Zajka's more limited study of Belarus, Rebecca Golbert's work in Ukraine (Gitelman, 1994; Golbert, 2001; Zajka, 1994) reaches conclusions similar to those I have reached based on my qualitative research in Slovakia. For example, the "contextual and performative nature of Jewish identity" is revealed through Goluboff's study of post-Soviet Jewry, in which she finds that "Jewishness in the Former Soviet Union involves both a physical and symbolic fight for economic and spiritual resources and ultimately a sense of belonging on a national scale" (2001, p. 68).

Why should it matter that findings in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere

are similar to those in Slovakia? The answer lies in the relatively different contexts within which Jewish communities have begun to reestablish themselves, contexts that lie on both sides of the pre- and post-1989 timeline. On the one hand, due to the different chronologies and consequences of communism, World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, Jewish life in Russia and the C.I.S. has followed a different historical trajectory than that of Central Europe. On the other hand, Jewish life in post-1989 Russia, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic has been greatly influenced by Western Jewish organizations, mostly from the U.S. and Israel. Slovakia, however, remains relatively ignored, both organizationally and financially, and Jewish communities there have developed fairly independently. Such organizational and financial independence suggests that Slovak Jewish communities might be seen as a kind of sociological “control group” that could validate or refute findings from other Central and East European Jewish communities.

3. Banská Bystrica, Slovakia: An Ethnographic Portrait

Introduction: Banská Bystrica in context

The largest town in central Slovakia, Banská Bystrica sits at the intersection of four major routes through Middle Europe. Prior to World War II, 10% of the city’s population was Jewish, and the Jewish community was fully integrated into the town’s physical and cultural geography (Bitušíková, 1996, p. 203; 1997, p. 2). However, the repressive regimes of 1938-1945 and 1948-1989 decimated the community and only since 1990 has the Jewish community begun to reestablish a

civic presence. Some people have long known of their Jewish roots, while others have discovered their heritage only by chance; and there remain those who either do not know about or reject their Jewishness. For those who acknowledge their Jewish identity, however, knowing that they are Jewish has changed their lives, and has made them feel, in the words of one young woman, as though they are “something else, and maybe something more.”²⁸

As a research site, Banská Bystrica offers challenges and opportunities particularly suited to an inquiry into Eastern European post-communist Jewish identity. Three of these are worth noting in detail. First, the Jewish community there is relatively “new,” having been established between 1861 and 1865, under the protection of liberal-nationalist Magyarization policies (Bárkány & Dojč, 1991, p. 257; Bitušíková, 1996, p. 203; Büchler, 1992, p. 5; Silber, 1992, p. 289; WA, 1984, p. 1). The historic foundations of Jewish-Slovak relations in Banská Bystrica are therefore, inextricably tied to the problem of national identity: the conflict between Slovak nationalism and Hungarian domination (Alter, 1989, p. 31; Mendelsohn, 1983, p. 141). Second, although Slovakia as a whole is 60-70% Roman Catholic, Protestants are quite prominent in Banská Bystrica; in some respects, Protestants have more in common with Jews than with Roman Catholics—for instance, they tend to be much warier of “church interference in politics” (Mihalíková, 1995, p. 25). Thus, the

²⁸ There are a number of parallels between the sense of identity described here and that in Davidman (2007), where “everyday religion is, for [her American] unsynagogued Jews, both chosen and unchosen, drawn from tradition and improvised, ethnic and religious at the same time” (Davidman, 2007, p. 64).

Jewish-Christian encounter may be observed in the more nuanced context of Jewish-Protestant and Jewish-Catholic relations. The importance of religion in Slovakia should not be understated: 82.5% of Slovaks “declare themselves to be believers” (Mihalíková, 1995, p. 25). This figure is exceeded only in Poland. Finally, Banská Bystrica was home to the 1944 Slovak National Uprising against Msgr. Josef Tiso and his Nazi puppet government then ruling Slovakia. The uprising, as its organizers and defenders understood it, stood for the virtues of modern ecumenical civil society over and against the vices of agrarian Roman Catholic nationalism, and the leadership of this uprising included a relatively large number of Protestants and Jews (see Bitušíková, 1996, p. 206). The event has since become central to the contemporary Slovak state’s program of national self-justification.

In noting the unique nature of Banská Bystrica’s religious population one may observe an apparent paradox. While the city has a considerable Protestant population, intermarriage between Jews and Christians has apparently linked Jews exclusively with Roman Catholics. Indeed, in all cases where the informants had intermarried or were children of intermarriage, the non-Jewish family member was Roman Catholic. In January 1997, moreover, a member of the Jewish community active since its inception told me that she could not think of a single instance of Jewish-Protestant marriage.

Although Jews and Roman Catholics have close ties at the personal and family levels, Jews and Protestants tend to have closer ties in the public sphere. At the civic organizational level (e.g., membership and participation in associations like the

Rotary Club, which also have higher levels of Protestant membership), there is a significant Jewish presence. Nevertheless, at the individual level (i.e., among friends and acquaintances), there is still considerable fear of revealing Jewish identity. This paradox reflects a historic difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic attitudes toward the Jewish community and Jews: Protestants have been inclusive in the public sphere, but exclusive in the private sphere, whereas Roman Catholics have been exclusive in the public sphere but more open to private relationships with Jews on an individual basis. This phenomenon may be a function more of general Protestant social exclusivity than of Protestant-Jewish relations specifically.

Marriages, presumably, follow upon friendships and other relationships, and may reflect financial considerations. Friendships and most other social relationships, however, do not necessarily entail discussions of religious heritage, although one might expect friendship dyads and groups to exhibit at least a degree of religious homogeneity. Nonetheless, marital pairings turn out to be Roman Catholic-Jewish rather than Protestant-Jewish at a rate that far exceeds the proportion of Roman Catholics to Protestants in the general population. Clearly, more research is needed: do Protestants and Jews, upon learning of their respective affiliations, choose not to marry one another? Are Protestants more likely to seek out romantic relationships among those whom they already know to be Protestant? Alternatively, to the extent that intermarriage is often perceived as a form of assimilation, do Jews seek intermarriage with members of the Roman Catholic majority, rather than become double minorities by marrying Protestants?

Perhaps the paradox also encapsulates the conflict in Slovakia between the Roman Catholic ideal of an ethno-religiously homogeneous “nation” and the Protestant notion of a culturally heterogeneous, pluralistic “civil society” (see Casanova, 1994, p. 109). If Slovakia, which is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, opts for some version of the former, then one might expect to see greater public tolerance for discrimination based on religion, because political power will tend to remain in Roman Catholic nationalist hands. Still, Slovakia has a tradition of great Protestant political reformers (Šafárik, Kollár, and Dubček) and of prominent Jewish cultural figures (Skutecký, Lorre, and Filip); these are typical roles for ethnic and religious minorities. It is possible that, as in the past, Jews will not acquire political power, but may regain the cultural and economic prominence they had before World War II (Bitušíková, 1997, p. 2). In as much as Slovaks are looking for “heroes” and other positive exemplars whom they can exhibit to the rest of the world, they may claim the achievements of Slovak Jews (past and present) as representative of the achievements of Slovakia generally (for a brief discussion of this phenomenon in the Polish context see Kugelmass, 1995, p. 299). It remains unclear, however, whether this will improve relations between Jews and non-Jews and integrate Jewish Slovaks into the broader society.

Ethnographic Data Collection

As of late 1997, there were approximately 100 people who would claim or admit to membership in the Jewish community (Bitušíková, 1996, p. 207); however,

the number of people in Banská Bystrica who are partly or fully Jewish is probably closer to 150. The “community”—the *židovská náboženská obec* (Jewish religious office)—was founded in 1990 by a small group of people who first set out to reclaim (via restitution) and restore buildings and sites that had been owned (before World War II and before 1948) by Jewish community institutions in Banská Bystrica. These properties include the cemetery, the *rabinát* (rabbi’s house), a school, and an old-age home. The synagogue had been demolished during the communist regime to make way for a planned freeway overpass, which never materialized. When I first arrived in Banská Bystrica in the summer of 1994, the community’s monthly meetings took place in a hired hall; one year later, restoration work at the rabbi’s house had progressed sufficiently to allow the organization to move into permanent offices on the first floor. Since then, the community’s president (who has served since co-founding the community in 1990) has hired a part-time assistant to staff the office and provide light secretarial services. Although community-wide meetings still take place monthly (or semi-monthly, during the summer and winter holidays), the office has open hours every Thursday afternoon. Most of the active members of the community stop in at least twice a month.

I conducted nine interviews with ten informants (two informants participated in one interview) in a variety of locations around Banská Bystrica, between 20 July and 7 August 1995. Most of the interviews were conducted in English; three involved an interpreter. Given there are anywhere from 100 to 150 Jews living in and around Banská Bystrica, these informants represent between 7% and 10% of the area’s

Jewish population. Of these informants, eight were women, and two were men. Two informants grew up before World War II, three came of age during the 1950s and 1960s, and five were born after 1970, the youngest having been born in 1975. The data used in this case study are drawn primarily from the five youngest informants, three of whom are women; thus, it may be skewed to reflect these specific age and gender influences. The findings detailed here seem to be generally representative of the whole community, but to the extent that they are drawn mostly from the reports of young informants, they may prove useful in anticipating future trends. Although more than a decade has passed since the interviews took place, I have no reason to believe that any responses would be significantly different today. I conducted short-term ethnographic fieldwork in Banská Bystrica from 1996 to 1998, and from September 1998 to December 1999, I conducted a long-term field study there. Since then, I have returned to Banská Bystrica almost every year, and I remain in contact with many of the interviewees who participated in this study. My ongoing participant observation in the life of the Slovak Jewish community leads me to conclude that attitudes have remained largely the same.

As in Belarus, Russia, Poland, and Ukraine (Gebert, 1994; Gitelman 1994; Golbert, 2001; Zajka, 1994), members of the younger generation of Slovak Jews appear to be increasingly interested in the reconstruction of Jewish life (Bitušíková, 1997). As Konstanty Gebert has commented in the Polish context, “for these young people, 1989, not 1968, was the watershed year” (Gebert, 1994, p. 167); that they have come of age under the conditions of a freer society is of critical importance to

understanding their motives and aspirations. Gitelman and Zajka have noted that younger Russian and Belarusian Jews identify more strongly with Judaism than do Jews of the previous two generations.²⁹ However, they “identify as such with reference to descent, nationality, and feelings, not belief or behavior” (Gitelman, 1994, p. 45). Alexandra Bitušiková notes younger Slovak Jews are similarly interested in Judaism, from the perspective of “communal solidarity, descent, and cultural and historical heritage.” She adds the appeal of Judaism may be heightened because it used to be ““taboo” for them” (Bitušiková, 1997, p. 1). These patterns of identification reinforce the extent to which, in an ethnically constituted nation-state like Slovakia, that is, a nation-state that classifies its citizens—in fact, if not in law—according to ethnicity (e.g., Slovak, Hungarian, Romany), the integration of Jewish individuals and social groups into the civic culture is not simply a procedural matter, but rather “an issue of political power and morality” (Gerrits, 1993, p. 100).

Implications of Jewish Identity

Few of the middle-aged informants, and none of the youngest informants, knew from birth that they were Jewish; all were told during their preteen or teenage

²⁹ One set of studies suggests the attitudes of young Jews interested in reclaiming their religious heritage are not representative of East European youth attitudes in general. The studies indicate the youth of the region tend to be less interested than their elders are in religious and/or spiritual matters. Interestingly enough, there appears to be a loose correlation between apathy toward religion and apathy toward “civil society.” (See Riordan, Williams, & Il'inskiĭ, 1995).

years by their parents. Olga H.,³⁰ now nearing fifty, recalls that when she was eleven years old, “I realized this word ‘*unser einer*’ [German for “one of us”] was repeatedly mentioned in our family, so I remember when I asked what “*unser einer*” means, and then it was explained to me.” For her part, Olga did not tell her own daughter, Daniela, until she was sixteen or seventeen. Daniela, now twenty-four, told me that at that time, a non-Jewish schoolmate suggested to her she might be Jewish. Daniela returned home and began to ask her mother questions about Judaism, its origins, and the reasons for anti-Semitism. Although Olga answered her questions, and indeed wondered why Daniela was so curious, she did not tell her of their heritage. Finally, two or three weeks later, Olga brought home a tape of the movie musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Only after the entire family had watched the movie did Olga tell Daniela, her twin sister, and their older brother, Stanislav, that they were Jewish. The same phenomenon may be observed among Hungarian Jews: the children of Holocaust survivors “explain almost ritualistically the surprise that they felt as teenagers when they found out that they were “of Jewish origin.” Many of them replicated this strategy with their own children, delaying the mention of a Jewish past to this next generation” (Goldstein, 1997, pp. 198-199).

Coming to terms with her Jewish heritage was, at first, difficult for Daniela—“I was confused but not sad, not at all.” Peculiar discoveries she had made in the house during her childhood began to make sense: books “kept in secret” she was not

³⁰ Names (but not family relationships) of informants have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Ages given reflect the respondent’s age at the time of the interview.

permitted to read and words in “a strange kind of writing [she] didn’t understand and couldn’t read” (Yiddish and Hebrew). “It is very strange,” she said, “because [I found out] after sixteen years of not knowing who I am and not knowing that my grandparents tried to hide...who they were because they really had a hard time during the war.... It was a subject we never discussed, but now it’s more open and clear.”

Judaism as culture or nation rather than faith

When one explores religious identity in this context—particularly regarding Jews—one must distinguish clearly among the categories of religiosity, ritual adherence, ethnic affinity, and spirituality. Daniela told me, “I’m not religious and I don’t pray, and I don’t think it’s wrong [not to pray].” For her, being Jewish is “national,” and possibly “spiritual,” that is, concerned with conscience rather than with ritual observance. To most informants, Judaism’s most important aspect is the cultural. None of the younger informants equated religious identity with Jewish identity. Twenty-year-old Viliam N. admitted he did not know “how to answer this question. I can tell you what is interesting to me,” he said, “the history, the culture, but it’s hard for me to answer to you what it means to me.” Anna L., also twenty, told me “it’s maybe a little bit of everything, but I wasn’t brought up in the religious way, so religion is the least thing for me.” Daniela’s brother, Stanislav, told me:

I’m proud to be [a] Jew, though I’m not really [a] Jew, but I’m proud to be in a family with Jew[s]....My father is not [a] Jew. Maybe I’m half a Jew....I was never growing in some religion....I was never going to Shabbat and Yom Kippur, or [keeping] Jewish traditions; I just know things about this....For me, to be a Jew is a question of culture.

Being Jewish invokes a strong sense of communal solidarity. For Luba D., Jewishness is a “nationality,” something “together with the community.” Jewishness is something “you feel.” As Daniela H. put it:

I do feel that I’m blessed that, being a Jew, I understand more my grandfather and grandmother and can feel for their people. And that’s what matters to me, because if they have a problem it’s my problem, too. That’s how I feel.

Martina L. tells her family blood is thicker than water, and her daughter Olga H. recalls the important question in her family was whether someone was “*unser einer*,” (one of us). Along with Martina and Olga, some informants felt an “us-versus-them” sense of belonging to a separate group within the Slovak polity more strongly than others did.³¹ This difference was not age- or gender-related. In spite of the social drawbacks of being Jewish, they felt as if they were “something special.” Anna L. recalled that even before she was told she is Jewish, she “could just feel it, in some way, that there was some Jewish thing in the air.” Today, Anna believes there is “culturally...something very special about Jewish people that makes them survive everything.... There is some special strength in Jewish people.” Of course, this sense of specialness can lead to a sense of exclusivity; for example, Luba D. reacted negatively when a non-Jewish woman, long sympathetic to Slovak Jews, joined a community trip to Bratislava’s Jewish Quarter. “I just didn’t like it,” Luba told me. “She has nothing to do there,” in other words, the woman was not “one of us.”

³¹ See Jackson (2013) for another take on the complexities of what she calls “intersectional diversity of religious belonging.”

Family, language, and the transmission of Jewish memory

Slovaks of Christian and Jewish origin share a common attachment to language, tradition, and family. In a society where traditions and folk customs are valued and even more so in their regional diversity, Jewish Slovak traditions and customs retain a high value in the Jewish community, especially among the young. Material culture, culinary specialties, and secular Jewish holidays like Hanukkah are important, and constitute the bulk of what they hope to pass along to their children. As Olga H. told me, “I like some customs and traditions, mainly the folk traditions.” Furthermore, it is important to the young Jews that they tell their children they are part of a Jewish family—not necessarily a community, or a religion, but rather a genealogical tradition passed down from grandparent to grandchild. For example, Viliam N. believes the Jewish community in Banská Bystrica has “no future,” and yet he would tell his children about the Jewish history of the town and how the community tried to rebuild the community after communism, and he would want his children “to come to the traditions.” As for religiosity, however, he told me, “I think that’s every [person’s] choice, and I wouldn’t like to put pressure on them.”

Twenty-five-year-old Stanislav H., who does not consider himself fully Jewish because his father is Roman Catholic, told me that “everybody has to know what happened forty-five years ago [the Holocaust and World War II].” As for his children, “they should know that their grandma and her family was Jewish.” At the same time, however, he is uncertain whether he will allow his children to adopt a Jewish identity: “it depends on the situation,” he told me, “this country is very

young,” Slovakia having been established only after the 1992-1993 “velvet divorce” that split Czechoslovakia. Stanislav’s sister Daniela is less fearful of the link between history and identity. She would tell her children “as much as I can, as I know, and I would teach them to respect these people. I would tell them all about my grandpa and my parents and their lives.” Her children, she told me, “would have to choose themselves” whether or not to take on a Jewish identity. Since both Stanislav and Daniela have married non-Jews, it is worth noting here that according to traditional Jewish law (*halakhah*), Stanislav’s children will have a religious standing different from that of Daniela’s children. Possibly since the time of Moses, but certainly since the time of Solomon, the *halakhah*, whose rulings are authoritative for the Jewish establishment in Israel and for the majority of Jews worldwide, has stated Jewishness is passed on exclusively through the maternal line. Therefore, while Stanislav and Daniela, as children of a Jewish mother, are both fully Jewish, only Daniela’s children will be Jewish in the strictest sense. That said, however, if the children of non-Jewish mothers were to be excluded from membership in the Banská Bystrica Jewish community, the community would disintegrate instantly. Indeed, in 2007, Anna L., whose father is Jewish but whose mother is Catholic, married her long-time boyfriend, who is *halachically* Jewish.³²

³² For an interesting study of the varieties of Jewish self-definition and their relation to intergenerational transmission of religious identity (see Giorgi & Pohoryles, 1996).

Gender as both transreligious and intrareligious categories

Gender, too, plays a role in the relative importance of Jewish identity. Gender roles in Slovakia are quite distinct, with women wholly responsible for the domestic sphere, and generally restricted from formal positions of power. Given the proscribed role of women in Slovak society, insofar as they have limited access to the educational, cultural, economic, and political spheres, Jewish women are far less likely to see their Jewish identity as a hindrance. They seem to realize that their status is more a result of their gender than of their religion. However, Jewish women have been generally more vocal than Jewish men have about their fear that anti-Jewish persecution will resume and/or intensify, perhaps because of their designated roles as custodians of the present and future welfare of the family. As for the men, to the extent that professional success is dependent on political connections (which Christians, particularly Roman Catholics, are more likely to have), they, especially young men, are more likely to feel held back by their Jewish roots. Where professional success is related to educational, cultural, and economic achievement (here Jews and Protestants historically have done better than Roman Catholics have), both men and women are less likely to feel a need to hide their Jewish identities.

The importance of Slovak identity

In discussing the notion of “Slovakness,” it is important to distinguish between civic identity and national identity. As political citizens, like their non-Jewish neighbors, the Jews of Banská Bystrica have been “Slovak” only since

Czechoslovakia ceased to exist on 1 January 1993. As members of a national group, however, Slovaks have developed a sense of national consciousness since the mid-19th century.

For the older interviewees, citizenship is a fact beyond individual control, regardless of whether one is a citizen of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak puppet state, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Czechoslovak Federative Republic, the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, or Slovakia. What matters, instead, as Andrea D. put it, is where one is born. Olga H. believes she “belongs to the Slovak nation” in a way that she does not “belong” to Israel. “I belong to this nation,” she told me, “which has its own language, the Slovak language. I like some customs and traditions, mainly the folk traditions. I can’t say I’m very proud, but I realize I’m Slovak, I’m just a normal Slovak.”

To be at once “at home”...

For the younger interviewees, it is much more important that one feel “at home,” that one feel comfortable in the country of one’s citizenship. Some feel this way in Slovakia. “It feels great,” said Daniela H.:

I wouldn’t want to be in any other different country....It’s a beautiful country. We have problems, of course, but I think it is a special country. We have traditions, we have to fight for our own country and language and everything. So we have a rich history.

Daniela’s sense of Jewish identity matches her Slovak identity. “I think I like being Slovak,” she said, “but I don’t regret being Jewish.... I feel Slovak and I know that I’m Jewish, and that’s all that matters to me.” Anna L. says, “Sometimes I’m proud

I'm Slovak because Slovak people are special, they're really good, they're hospitable, and there is something very special about us, too. For instance, the families here have really good relationships between children and parents and grandparents." Judging from their comments here, both Daniela and Anna combine an affective affinity for and pride in their Slovak nationality with a cognitive understanding and acceptance of their Jewish heritage. Although the one does not appear to detract from the other, for them "Slovak-ness" seems to require an aspect of positive affirmation that "Jewishness" does not. However, this may simply be the case because Slovakia is a young country still carving out an identity for itself. Again, the comparison to Hungary is useful:

It is precisely [the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors] who are embracing a Jewish identity as something compatible with their identity as Hungarians. They are, perhaps, one group that can forge a dual or polyglot identity that would not threaten their rights to citizenship within contemporary Hungary. (Goldstein, 1997, p. 207).

Although she says she is proud to be Slovak, Anna does not like "crazy" ultranationalists, but neither does she like "people who underestimate Slovakia.... You can see [these people] wearing the American flag and the British flag...and symbols of other wealthy countries, but they are not our country's.... And I don't like that." For Anna, Jewishness coincides with Slovakness in a cosmopolitan way: "It's natural," she said. "I think there is even something in being a European Jew. They [have] to assimilate to the nation...to change a little bit to be able to live with the nation where they live. I think this is especially so for Europe. I think it goes together; it has to." Stanislav sees himself as "the son of my parents who are Slovak and

Jewish.... I feel half a Jew and half a Slovak.” He shares Anna’s nuanced view of the importance of being Slovak: “I like this country. I know this is a very rich country but...the society we live [in] does not know how to use the rich world we have.... But I’m glad I’m Slovak.... It’s a culture, too, [and a] nationality.”

... and also a stranger in one’s own land

Still, there are younger Jews who do not feel at home in Slovakia. When I asked twenty-year-old Viliam N. what it means to him to be Slovak, he said, “Nothing.” I asked him, “How about Czechoslovak?” He replied, “That’s better.” In the end, he told me that he would rather live somewhere else. When I asked him how he negotiates being Jewish and Slovak or Czechoslovak, he said simply, “I don’t feel like a Slovak. I don’t know.” For twenty-one-year-old Ľuba D., as well, it means “not too much” to be Slovak; after all, she said, “I wanted to leave here.” For her, to be a citizen means “I feel at home, that I have friends and family, that I feel good there and not scared.” She does not feel this way in Slovakia because she believes she “can’t tell anyone [she’s] Jewish.” Perhaps as a result, Ľuba feels a strong dichotomy within herself: “I think being Jewish and Slovak are two separate things.... I’m Jewish with my family within the community. With my friends, I am Slovak; they don’t know [I’m Jewish].”

It would appear, then, that Slovak identity is not dependent on Jewish identity. Rather, it depends on each individual’s concerns, goals, and prospects of fulfilling those goals. Those who believe they can succeed in Slovakia, or have already done

so, feel themselves a part of Slovak society. Nonetheless, all the informants feel a deep attachment to the landscape and cultural heritage of the Slovak nation. They take great pride in their country's natural and human resources. Anna L. said, "I have a good feeling that I'm a representative of a small country, and I'm trying to help to build the name of Slovakia."

The vicissitudes of identity: Religion and nationality

The general patterns of identity expressed here represent a sea change from the pre-World War II situation in Slovakia. Census data from 1910 to 1930 includes information about both "religious affiliation" and "nationality;" of the 4.8% of Slovaks who claimed a Jewish religious affiliation, 54.3% considered themselves to be of "Jewish" nationality as well (rather than Czech, Slovak, German, or Magyar). In contrast, of the Bohemian Jews who accounted for only 1.3% of the total Bohemian population, only 14.6% claimed Jewish nationality (Leff, 1988, pp. 16-22, *passim*). During the inter-war years, Bitušíková observes, "ethnicity seems to have been of less importance than [religious identity] for the Jews"; twice as many people registered "Jewish" as their religion than registered "Jewish" as their ethnic affiliation (Bitušíková, 1996, p. 203). However, the interviews conducted for this study indicate contemporary Slovak Jews are far more likely than their forebears were to claim Slovak nationality even as they acknowledge an ethnic, cultural, or even spiritual affiliation with Judaism. This may be the indirect result of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the beginning of the twentieth century, "Jewish

nationality” was still an attractive abstraction, unencumbered by the realities of citizenship and the mundane exigencies of passports. Today, Jewish nationality is inextricably tied to the question of Israel—and it is an open question whether one can simultaneously be Slovak and Israeli. In the context of this study, one informant who had traveled to Israel (for the purpose of studying at university there) did use the Law of Return to acquire an Israeli passport—in addition to her Slovak one—but she does not want to live in Israel, and she still thinks of herself as a citizen of Slovakia. This ambivalence is echoed in Golbert’s study of Ukrainian Jewish youth, in which she unpacks the complexity of visions of the space and idea of Israel (2001, p. 728).

When this shift away from a “national” Jewish identity is considered alongside the apparent absence of any stable notions of identity, what emerges is a fundamental ambivalence. Even the question of how to conduct annual Jewish New Year community meetings—as regular business meetings to discuss property restitution issues and to deliver an annual report, or to make time for communal prayer and other spiritual, intellectual, or cultural discourse—suggests an inability to decide whether to return to “early modern” pre-World War II identities or to adopt new “late modern” postcommunist identities. These conflicts reflect what Anthony Giddens has termed the “displacement” of tradition, that is, “de-traditionalization:” the separation, both ideological and physical, of the community, from the practices and beliefs that were its characteristic traits and that had defined it *vis-à-vis* the outside world (Giddens, 1990, p. 141).

No one in the Banská Bystrica Jewish community with whom I have spoken

desires a full retraditionalization—especially if one defines tradition in the narrowest sense of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The Jewish community of Banská Bystrica has a number of resources from which to draw, since Judaism as a whole is simultaneously religion, nation, and ethnic. Anthony D. Smith has called the Jewish people a “politicized community of culture” (Smith, 1992, p. 230); similarly, Barbara Holdrege refers to the Jewish people as an “embodied community” to the extent that “tradition-identity” (as opposed to doctrine-identity) is incorporated “in the particularities of ethnic-cultural categories” (Holdrege, 1996, pp. 7-8). To the extent the Jewish community has reconstituted itself, or has “re-embodied” itself as a living community, it has developed an identity for itself. Even if that identity is and remains essentially indefinable as a whole, it remains open to analysis according to patterns of religion and culture (which includes the idea of religion as culture), of observance and nonobservance (which includes consideration not only of *if*, but also of *how* observance takes place), and of purity and impurity (which encompasses not only legal questions about genealogy and biology, but also social questions about the boundaries of community).

Civic efficacy and dual identity

Common to all informants was the feeling, reminiscent of W. E. B. Dubois’s phrase, of a “double consciousness.” To be Jewish in Slovakia is a struggle between fitting in and standing out. If their Jewish identity transcends genealogy to include a sense of belonging (*unser einer*), and their Slovak identity transcends state citizenship

to include an affinity with social and folk customs, then to be a Jewish Slovak is to be a member of a nation within a nation (Jewish within Slovak).³³ Understanding this sense of otherness is critical to any exploration of the tension in Slovakia between ethnocracy and democracy, between exclusivist ethnocentrism on the one hand and civil society on the other.

What, then, is the relationship between being Slovak and being Jewish? Ernest Gellner has argued the presence or absence of civil society in the struggling nation-states of postcommunist Europe may determine the success or failure of democracy there (Gellner, 1994). In the case of Slovakia, the political system is teetering precariously between two alternatives from which Gellner's notion of civil society is absent: the one, in which an all-powerful state apparatus exercises hegemonic authority over a disenfranchised, or simply apathetic, citizenry, and the other, a political abyss in which an ethnonationalist and populist élite enacts (or more likely, creates), a xenophobic proto-fascist "will of the people" (see Carpenter, 1997, p. 207; Leff, 1994, pp. 267-269; Mihalíková, 1995).

If it is true religious commitment and religious organizations are vital to the establishment and maintenance of both the nation and its civil society, and if it is true "without tradition there can be no nation; without a nation there can be no civil society" (Shils, 1995, p. 118), then the reappropriation of religious traditions and religious identities (in this case, those of Judaism) might contribute to the construction of a civic state in the Slovak Republic (Gitelman, 1994, p. 36; see also

³³ Again, to be sure, the Slovak-Jewish situation is hardly unique.

Agh, 1994, pp. 120-1124, *passim*), that is, a state in the power structure both allows and encourages not only democratic participation, but also political, economic and cultural efficacy on the part of individual citizens and social groups organized around a variety of interests that include, but certainly are not limited to, ethnic and nationalist ones.

Core to this case study—and indeed my understanding of the interstitial religious middle ground—is the negotiation not only over the nature of identity but of the very authority to self-define. Unlike the earlier cases in which relationship with the external secularized environment is more or less adversarial, the relationship here is far more ambivalent; indeed, it could be argued that Slovak Jews are struggling to cope with both sides of the equation. Like Diaspora Jews across the globe, Slovaks see themselves as part of a small and struggling nation; thus, Jewish Slovaks walk a fine line between feeling pride in their peoplehood and feeling alienation at their minority status within both the state and the world. Their task (of special interest to sociotheologians, *pace* Juergensmeyer, 2011) is to negotiate a careful path between complete alienation and total assimilation. Indeed, concern about assimilation, and attempts at counter-assimilation, are a recurring theme throughout this dissertation.

SIX. “BROKEN PEOPLE JUST TRYING TO HAVE CHURCH”

The remaining case studies in this dissertation, though divided by religion, share their origins in the “seeker” turn in American religion. However, contrary to the interpretations generated through variations on secularization theory, I argue that seeker services are sites at which religious forms are taken out of their “traditional” contexts and subsequently redeployed in a new guise privileging cultural affiliation over communal membership and the emotional over the ethical. The voluntaristic ego-centered social network replaces the membership-based community institution; and spiritual “experiences” are preferred to cognitive religious behaviors.

1. Gee, whiz! Secularization theorists go to church

In turning to the study of seeker services and seeker religion, first, I want to explore why the phenomenon is of scholarly interest. Studying seeker services and seeker churches long has had a “Gee, whiz!” element to it, as surprised journalists and sociologists alike have encountered—against every expectation—thousands of people attending religious services that feature contemporary popular music and sermons that relate to attendee lives. We return repeatedly during fieldwork, marveling at the latest innovation, whether PowerPoint slides of hymn lyrics or video clips from popular (even R-rated) movies. Ultimately, this “Gee, whiz!” factor is the residue of the secularization thesis: reliance on the underlying assumptions of this model has stymied attempts to understand or explain the significance of seeker religion in American society.

What is a “seeker church”? The simplest definition, as Kimon Sargeant puts it, is “one that tailors its programs and services to attract people who are not church attenders” (Sargeant, 2000, p. 2). It is important to distinguish seeker churches from individual “seekers” themselves. That term has come to have two different connotations, one a quality of existence and the other a quality of action. On the one hand, there is the notion that contemporary American religion no longer is characterized by tradition and ascription, but rather by experience and choice. In this sense, everyone is a seeker; Wade Clark Roof calls Baby Boomers “A Generation of Seekers” and uses the term to refer to the idea that people “have to discover for themselves what gives their lives meaning...what really matters [is] a question of personal choice and experience” (Roof, 1993, p. 8). On the other hand, seekers can be people who are active “religious seekers.” Robert Wuthnow describes people who “explore new spiritual vistas...[and] negotiate among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality” (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 4). Roof’s seekers characterize a generation different from its forbears, who could “simply...adopt the meanings and values handed down by [their] parents’ religion;” Wuthnow’s seeking represents a significant shift from “dwelling,” the idea that people can inhabit a sacred safe space and feel secure. It is important to recognize the distinction among these terms: although all three reflect the notion of purposeful religious choices, one cannot state, simply, that all seeker churches attract seekers who are seeking. In reaching out to non-attenders, seeker churches need not adopt a seeker-friendly theology. Religious seekers may find themselves at non-seeker congregations. Moreover, seeking itself is

not restricted to non-attenders.

Willow Creek, secularization theory, and the media

The influence of secularization theory can be seen in the earliest national media coverage of Willow Creek Community Church in 1989. Journalists seemed surprised to find congregations growing, rather than shrinking, as well as intrigued to see secular notions—whether business metaphors or popular music—emerging in religious organizations. These two phenomena run counter to two key premises of secularization theory, the decline of religiosity, and the secularization of religion itself. Moreover, as I noted earlier, the reorientation from collective characteristics to individual ones, has been especially important to mapping the religious characteristics of American Baby Boomers, whose religious habits first triggered the study of seeker religion. If Willow Creek caught the attention of journalists and scholars because it contradicted the expectations of secularization theory, then seeker religion caught their attention because it did not fit into any conventional maps of American religion.

Willow Creek falls into the category of the congregation commonly known as the megachurch. Defined by Scott Thumma as “a congregation which has two thousand or more worship attenders in a week,” the typical megachurch is a non-denominational suburban Protestant Christian congregation; the most common type, oriented toward religious seekers and non-attenders, aims to “create new religious forms, to remake the traditions, so they are acceptable and relevant to a modern person who had been turned off by traditional religion” (Thumma, 2001a).

Megachurches have received relatively little scholarly attention—only two completed doctoral dissertations (Eiesland, 1995; Thumma, 1996; see also Elisha 2011) and a handful of articles (Thumma, 2001b; see, for example, Eiesland, 1997). They first attracted media attention in the early 1980s as a number of megachurches emerged in Houston, Texas, and elsewhere in the Deep South (Carey, Benham, Hawkins, Lynch, & Thornton, 1984; Gates & Shapiro, 1984; see also Yardley, 1984 and Witham, 1990). They became players in the battles over the future of the Southern Baptist Convention, siding with theological and political conservatives (Carey, 1985; Ingwerson, 1988; Lord, Lanier, & Peterson, 1985; Morgan, 1988). Partly as a result, media coverage of televangelist Pat Robertson’s 1988 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination noted his support among megachurch leaders and attendees (Fenyvesi, 1987; Rainie & Golden, 1987). Other early stories on megachurches focused on zoning and land-use controversies (see, for example, Ervin, 1990); in other articles (e.g., Bailey, 1990), their sheer size was the story. In these, the influence of secularization theory is quite visible insofar as they emphasize the theme of religion-as-business.

Willow Creek seems to have drawn the attention of reporters because it fell into the category of churches that are growing despite a national trend of decline in church attendance and membership. Writing in *Time*, Barbara Dolan observed, “at a time when the mainstream Protestant denominations are rapidly losing members, Willow Creek’s popular success and stripped-down theology are challenging traditional notions about presenting the Christian message” (Dolan, 1989). Thomas A.

Stewart of *Fortune* traced the slow decline of church membership and the shift in “market share” from mainline congregations to conservative ones; he described Willow Creek as “the paradigm of customer orientation” (Stewart, 1989). Russell Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times* introduced Willow Creek as “the prototype for successful churches of the 1990s, exemplifying approaches they think will reach an increasingly secular and pluralistic society” (Chandler, 1989). In all three of these instances, the emphasis was on the counter-intuitive success of the church.

As reporters explored Willow Creek, a second strand of secularization theory-infused analysis emerged: the secularization of religion itself. Thus, Willow Creek came to represent the introduction of secular ideas—particularly from marketing and customer service—into religious life. Indeed, two of the earliest articles on Willow Creek appeared in business magazines, *Crain’s Chicago Business* (Valeo, 1989) and *Fortune* (Stewart, 1989), profiling Willow Creek Community Church as a model of customer service (Stewart, 1989; Valeo, 1989; see also “Divine sell,” 1990). Valeo describes Hybels as a “market-wise pastor” who was “groomed to be an entrepreneur;” Stewart’s article surveys American religious culture to show how “words familiar from boardrooms—market research, customer satisfaction, asset management—resound in pastoral and diocesan offices.” Willow Creek also makes an appearance in *Megatrends 2000* (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990, cited in Mortimer, 1990) as the harbinger of the “high tech church,” which uses all the tools of the customer service industry to succeed. Other religion coverage focused on the use of advertising campaigns (Span, 1987), telemarketing (Dart, 1988), and religious

publications, such as Bibles, designed especially for businesspeople (Beam, 1989).

2. New Song: Portrait of a GenX church

First Impressions

I first attended New Song services on Christmas Eve 1995.³⁴ Leaving home around 5:00 in the early evening, I drove east on the 10 Freeway from the west side of Los Angeles. East of downtown, one approaches the so-called Inland Empire, which encompasses parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties. Large shopping centers and auto malls line the freeway; behind them, single-story suburbia stretches as far as the eye can see.

At the time of my research, New Song held its weekend services at Royal Oak Intermediate School in Covina, some 30-40 miles east of central Los Angeles. Looking west from Grand Avenue, the horizon dips just where the skyscrapers rise above downtown; as far as the eye can see, the flat landscape is covered with housing

³⁴ Because New Song is a “Generation X” church both in its mission and in its demographics, and because many GenXers experience “church” as mostly a weekend activity, although others do participate more actively, I shall divide this report into two sections, “First Impressions: Portrait of a Buster Church” and “How Do They Do It? Notes Toward Some Unscientific Conclusions.” Although it self-defines as church for GenXers, rather than for Baby Boomers, New Song Church nevertheless shares with the Boomer-oriented megachurch culture from which it emerged a palpable difference between the experience of attending a weekend service and the experience of becoming actively involved in the day-to-day life of the church. Even though my participant-observation was limited to that of an ethnographer-in-training (and Jewish at that!), I sense that there is in New Song a fairly deep divide between congregants who are only weekend attendees and congregants who are committed members. The difference may be seen in how the two groups behave at the weekend service. Weekend attendees tend to arrive shortly before the service and leave soon after it, stopping only briefly to chat with acquaintances or to greet one or two staff members. Committed members come earlier and leave later; on Sundays, some frequently attend one service and use part or all of the other service to have informal meetings with lay leaders and clergy.

tracts interrupted infrequently by small business districts, and more frequently by church spires. The neighborhood around Royal Oak School is much the same—one-story single-family dwellings, a few shopping centers, and at least three Protestant churches between the freeway and the school, a distance of about one mile. Within only a several-mile radius, I later learned, there are about forty colleges and universities, Christian and secular, private and public.

The services I attended were held in the gymnasium near one corner of the campus, and about seventy-five yards to the south, classroom buildings house the Sunday school classes. As I pulled my car into the large parking lot that separates the gym from the street, I noticed that the lot was filled mostly with mid-range four-door cars and minivans—Hondas, Toyotas, a few Fords and Chevrolets, and the occasional Chrysler or Volvo.

The hundred-yard path to the gym was lined with candles; this enhancement is repeated in similar forms on non-holiday weekends. At the end of the path, at the gym door, church staff members had set up folding tables with red tablecloths on which one could find basic information about New Song Church. Greeters at the outside door smiled and welcomed newcomers and regulars alike. Inside the narrow foyer, to the left, there was a black display folding screen, in front of which stood a table holding two red file boxes containing manila folders with the names of staff members and lay leaders. As I came to learn, this is an efficient way to transmit messages and small packages to and from congregants. Behind, to the right, a portable bulletin board listed not only upcoming events, but also advertisements for products and

services (both offered and wanted) of interest to the congregation—childcare notices were particularly in evidence. Next to the bulletin board was a table holding a large container of weak coffee—sugar was available, but not milk—Styrofoam cups, donut pieces, and small white paper plates and napkins. Ahead, to the right, a silver-haired couple in their early to middle 60s stood behind another table displaying t-shirts, CDs, videocassettes, and pamphlets describing the various small groups that meet under New Song’s auspices.

As I passed into the gymnasium proper, another greeter handed me a small booklet that contained not only the usual “message notes”—activity announcements and the like—but also a page dedicated to the service. (On other occasions, this page was separated and triple-punched for a small notebook, with fill-in-the blank sentences to be completed during the sermon and citations of relevant Bible passages.) I noticed that most people also carried Bibles—not pristine editions, but well worn, dog-eared, and much marked copies that reflected hours of study and annotation.

The space for worship—the gymnasium’s multipurpose basketball court, complete with hideaway bleachers—cannot be described as a traditional sanctuary. Near center court, a low platform (portable wooden planks covered with Astroturf) served as the main stage. On either side were six-foot-high speaker sets and on one side, a large video screen. The stage itself held a full microphone setup, and the complete accoutrements of a five- to seven-piece rock band, including a full drum kit. The front of the platform was decorated with arrangements of white flowers (another

enhancement repeated during the year; whenever someone has “become a Christian” in the past week, a special white-rose centerpiece is added to the arrangement), and in front of the platform, in about a sixty-degree arc, were rows of folding chairs, complemented by one set of gym bleachers for the overflow. Some could have thought that it resembled the set-up for a rock concert, but to me it more closely resembled the kind of worship arrangements I had seen in my teens at Jewish summer camps—informal spaces, purpose-built for the occasion, which somehow encouraged spontaneous and authentic prayer. Since during the rest of the week, this is a regular school gym, a special team of congregants and staff sets up and strikes the entire worship space each weekend, and much of the equipment has to be set up twice, since it is stored securely between the Saturday and Sunday services. In a theologically conservative congregation like New Song, one that seeks to recover a sense of the original *ekklesia*, there is something special about recreating one’s worship space each week.

That Christmas Eve, as I looked around the gym, which was filled by 250-300 worshippers (only slightly above average attendance), I saw mostly young couples in their mid to late twenties and early thirties, some with young children. Although they generally were dressed for Christmas Eve, at other services they wore everything from khaki shorts with a white t-shirt to dark slacks with a conservative button-down shirt or a print dress with a ruffled blouse. White, khaki, and navy blue were by far the most popular colors. By appearances, congregants were mostly non-Hispanic Caucasian, working- to upper-middle-class; there was a handful of Black and

Hispanic congregants, and more bi-ethnic and bi-racial couples than I had expected from my first impressions of the local area as I drove through the neighborhood. About 35-40% of the congregants were singles and couples; about 30-35% were members of young families; about 20-25% were teenagers; and no more than 10% were above the age of 45. The response card bundled with the message notes included eight age categories, the seventh of which was “46+” (the others were 5-11, 12-17, 18-23, 24-29, 30-35, 36-40, and 41-45). About three-quarters of the congregation was sitting or standing with people they appeared to know; but these cluster groups were relatively small (2-3 couples or families). From casual observation it was impossible to tell which couples were married, and which singles were separated or divorced; it was similarly difficult to tell which congregants were committed Christians and which were “pre-Christians” or “potential Christians,” to use New Song parlance. The attendance card included categories for “single,” “married,” “separated,” “divorced,” and “widowed”; it also allowed respondents to request either that information about becoming a Christian be sent through the mail or that someone from the church contact them directly.

Since the Christmas Eve service turned out to be similar in form and content to other services during the rest of the year, it is perhaps most useful at this point to describe a typical New Song worship service, drawing examples from Christmas Eve as well as other occasions.

According to the lead pastor, average weekend attendance at the time was 850, and most congregants attended twice per month; thus, the congregation was

approximately 1700 people. The Saturday 6:45pm service was drawing about 150-200, the Sunday 9:00am service about 200-250, and the Sunday 10:45am service about 250-350. The service started with an extended jam session by the church band, which performs well-rehearsed contemporary Christian music (CCM) ranging from acoustic folk-rock to slightly modified grunge. The formal proceedings began when a singer—usually female—invited the congregation to join her in worship. Worship, in the New Song context, refers primarily to singing contemporary but nonetheless prayerful songs, the words of which are projected on the video screen. For anywhere from 10-20 minutes at the beginning of the 75-minute service, the congregants stood together and sang their praise to God. Some of them (mostly people in their early 30s or older) raised one or two hands to receive the Holy Spirit; however, in subsequent interviews, a number of respondents indicated that New Song was emphatically not a Pentecostal or charismatic church, and that, in the past, people seeking an emphasis on that particular kind of experience had voluntarily left the church.

After the opening worship, a brief prayer typically was offered in informal language, sometimes by the worship leader, at other times by the pastor leading the service. At that point, the service proceeded according to the specific plans prepared by the staff team for that weekend; during my fieldwork, I saw a skit about parenting teenagers, a presentation on saving troubled marriages, and a MTV-esque video about the setup/teardown team that makes everything possible each weekend. This segment could last anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, and often included brief self-introductions and announcements by staff members responsible for church activities

and services, such as childcare, small groups, and support groups. Most of the time (except when the previous segment is particularly long or already incorporates music) the worship band then returned for a 7-10 minute segment, usually with new music composed to reflect the theme of the service. Then the preaching pastor—often a member of the staff’s executive team—presented the Bible teaching for the week. During the course of this 20-30 minute teaching session (not really a sermon), congregants were referred to the triple-punched notebook insert in order to fill in the blanks. Not only do the sheets provide a cumulative home study guide (there is always a section outlining a personal Bible-reading program for the week), but they also give attendees a way to participate in the teaching session, rather than just sitting back and absorbing (or not) a straightforward sermon. In their substantive content, the notebook inserts I saw ranged from the impressive to the extraordinary; for example, a teaching session on the Gospel of Mark and St. John the Baptist included solid historical information alongside theological lessons. One may infer that having a pre-formatted page for note-taking means that the preaching pastors could significantly raise the content-value of the presentations.

The conclusion of the service generally incorporated further prayer and musical worship. On occasion, however, there were additional presentations: for example, the service on saving troubled marriages included an interview with a couple who had endured hard times but ended up staying together, followed by a video clip from the conclusion of the movie *Forget Paris* (with Billy Crystal and Debra Winger) in which the couple separates (but doesn’t divorce) and then gets back

together. Service ended with the worship band leading an extended jam as exit music.

Following the service, congregants generally mingled for about 5-10 minutes, long enough to reunite families dispersed among services and Sunday school classrooms, and for young singles and couples to catch up with one another or confer with one of the pastors. During my research visits, there was no extended fellowship hour for the entire congregation; on many occasions, however, various groups scheduled activities immediately following the service.

What strikes the first-time visitor or the repeat attender who is not a regular member? Here is what I noticed:

First, of course, the setting—a junior high school gym, hardly a traditional church sanctuary—and the music—in style, if not in content, no different from what one might have heard on a top-twenty radio station during the drive over. These two elements suggest that the New Song experience is considerably different from any previous encounters with Christian liturgy, and have the effect of rendering moot any prejudgments about “going to church.” The result, I think, is that one is more open to the content of the service (however traditional that content might be). With other congregations or church communities, one might have entered a “traditional church,” heard “traditional music,” and then—as if on cue—“tuned out,” “turned off,” and ultimately “dropped out.” Not so at New Song, where the congregation is engaged from the very first, and nothing can be taken for granted.

Second, to the novice fieldworker visiting a seeker church, it was a bit surprising to see the people who appeared to be in charge—even the lead pastor—

wearing short sleeve red or blue polo shirts, or white t-shirts, and khaki shorts. “Wait a minute,” one thinks, “these are regular people!” Just as the non-traditional setting and music confound any preconceptions or prejudices and open one up to the experience, so, too, does the informal dress have the effect of making one pay attention to what the informally dressed speaker is actually saying?

Third, the content and message of the service itself was inviting without being overwhelming, and the underlying message was one of sincerity, honesty, and genuine concern. One interviewee described New Song as “just broken people trying to have church,” and I think that once the church’s reputation for a non-traditional setting, contemporary music, and an informal atmosphere brought the visitors through the front door, this is what kept them in their seats. Not only did the presentations engage congregants on their “walk with the Lord” without judging them for their faults, but the clergy themselves also did not set themselves up above the lay people as models of perfection. At the service on saving troubled marriages, a senior pastor spoke openly, honestly, and even explicitly, about his own marital difficulties, and admitted that he and his wife were still healing together. In an interview, one respondent told me about a service in which a senior pastor had described an afternoon of male bonding and football-watching during which he and some friends had playfully recounted a couple of gay jokes. Suddenly, one of the men spoke up to say that he did not like the jokes because he was struggling with his sexual orientation. The pastor described how he realized, and regretted, the pain he had caused. When he spoke at the service, he was not ashamed to admit his transgression

publicly, and he did not shy away from telling the congregation not to make the same mistake. At the same time, he did not compromise on his Bible-based belief that homosexuality is wrong, but he reminded his listeners that “hate the sin and love the sinner” is more than an empty bumper-sticker slogan. Every time I attended services at New Song, I came away impressed by the extent to which the church enacted a ministry paradigm of “grace” (as opposed to what a number of interviewees called “legalism,” that is, emphasis on enforcing strict rules of behavior).

This is not to say that New Song was without its challenges. Although I shall write more later about some persistent tensions, two in particular struck me as a first-time visitor. First, the gathering felt more like an aggregation of small groups than a congregation of a single body, and the absence of a fellowship hour after the service only reinforced limits on inter-group interaction among attendees. Second—and this became more clear the more I attended—the fact that the service location that time was not only separate from the church offices (by a good 10 miles) but also separate from any congregational activities other than Sunday School meant that there was a considerable divide between *attending* New Song on the weekend and *getting involved* in life of the church, a divide that presented the prospective member with a significant logistical and emotional barrier. Not only did one have to read the message notes quite carefully to determine what might be of interest, but one then had to take the often daunting step of reaching out to an anonymous voice (or worse—voicemail) on the telephone to ask about getting involved. To be sure, the response card helped a little—letting the prospective member check off boxes referring to interest groups—

but it was impossible just to drop by midweek or hang out after services in order to see what is going on. This is a pity, because quite a bit was going on, as I learned through two months of intensive interviews and site visits. This is the topic of the next portion of the case study.

How do they do it? Fieldnotes toward some unscientific conclusions

New Song, as I encountered it, was succeeding for five main reasons: a) the New Song experience reflects an uncomplicated, but nevertheless challenging, message to evoke an individual experience both of intimacy and of accountability; b) it is concerned with authenticity; c) its ritual/liturgical structure is flexible, providing for a wide range of human-divine interactions; d) its organizational/social structure is flexible, providing for a wide range of interpersonal relations within the church; e) it accommodates both committed members and regular “church hoppers,” and draws upon resources from the outside world.

In this section, I shall expand on each of these reasons, using an adaptation of Ninian Smart’s dimensional approach to the study of religion to show how each of the five elements pervades the life of the New Song community. Smart writes of seven dimensions of religion—doctrinal, ethical, social-organizational, ritual, experiential, mythical, and material. Here I condense them to five—doctrinal/ethical, social-organizational, ritual/material, experiential, and mythical—and deploy them to highlight different emphases in each of five reasons for New Song’s apparent success. Moreover, each element in the succession listed here depends on the presence of any

previous one(s) in order to be effective.

The New Song experience reflects an uncomplicated, but challenging, message to evoke an individual experience both of intimacy and of accountability.

Organizationally, the church expresses its mission as follows: “To make fully devoted followers of Christ, mostly out of Generation X and their families, for the purpose of multiplying groups and churches all over the place.” This is a straightforward goal; it is not only easy to conceptualize and to communicate, but it also lends itself well to achieving specific sub-objectives serving to advance the larger vision. Staff members at New Song tend to be project-oriented rather than task-oriented; whenever possible, they seek to “raise up” lay leaders in the various ministries in which they work.

Experientially, however, the message’s straightforwardness is neither intended as an easy quick fix, nor is it perceived as such. Conversion—“becoming a Christian” and setting off on one’s “walk with the Lord”—is no less the centerpiece of New Song’s mission than of any other evangelical church, and even the busiest staff members still pursue one-to-one evangelism and discipleship efforts. This is largely the work of the lead pastor. Even at the most agenda-packed staff meeting, he will still call on staffers to share personal “yeah, God” stories about their ministry efforts, and he will frequently interrupt even the driest of planning meetings to ask for a collective prayer for guidance and support.

Such a relationship, however intentional or goal-oriented, is nonetheless seen

as a process; time and again, church leaders stress that conversion is not an end in and of itself, but rather a beginning. It follows, then, that the profoundness of the conversion experience is tied to a rigorous notion of accountability: as one interviewee told me:

The thing that guides me here is that I have my own relationship with God. I can talk to Him whenever I want to talk to Him. If I do something wrong, I have to answer to Him, myself. No one there is going to sit there and watch me. And I think that's a lot harder to deal with than going and telling somebody else or going to church and saying, okay God, please forgive me and then walk out. If I can do it at home, I can do it anywhere I am, [that is], saying, "I repent." And I have to truly repent or truly say that I'm not going to do something again because since it's a personal relationship, there's only me and Him. Not a million people watching.

The very simplicity of the personal relationship—the “one-on-one-ness,” as another interviewee put it—gives direct expression to an exposure and vulnerability that is experienced, among other ways, as accountability. I shall return to this sense of exposure and vulnerability below, in my discussion of authenticity, but the point here is that the intimacy of the personal relationship with Jesus Christ New Song encourages is inextricably linked with a strong sense of individual ongoing accountability to that relationship.

To be sure, that accountability is expressed communally. Doctrinally and ethically, the church interprets the Great Commandment(s)³⁵ and the Great

³⁵ Matthew 22:37-39: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Commission³⁶ in such a way as to understand that its realm of endeavors consists in worship, service, evangelism, baptism (community), and teaching. At a church-wide meeting convened to consider New Song's priorities over the next ten years, the senior pastor and other church leaders discussed each of the five aspects of church life:

- a) Worship, as interpreted by the church's executive team leader for celebration, involves praise—from weekend services to the worldwide web—performance—not only presenting the message to churchgoers, but also, as she put it, “taking it to the streets, where the people are at”—and prayer—especially intercessory prayer on behalf of all church ministries—to be offered not only at crisis moments, but regularly at the weekend services and at other church-related meetings.
- b) Service, the senior pastor said, refers to “meeting needs, both in the church and in the community.” Another senior staff member emphasized that “everyone is called to serve,” in ways ranging from mentoring affianced and newlywed couples to offering a babysitting service so parents can have a “date night.”
- c) Evangelism is a high priority at New Song, both globally and locally. The senior pastor's goal is that 80% of church growth over the next ten years should comprise new Christians, not church-switchers. The associate pastor

³⁶ Matthew 28:19-20: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

responsible for outreach called on the church to “raise up” at least 200 missionaries within the next year, and five hundred thousand dollars to support their activities; it was important, moreover, that these missionaries (and all those involved with evangelizing) be “intentional” within church, families, neighborhoods, communities, and the world so as to reach as many of the unchurched as possible, and to minister effectively to them. One way to be intentional, he suggested, was for the church to set up a nightly coffeehouse for informal conversation.³⁷

- d) Baptism, as the senior pastor described it, is the primary way for Christians to identify with Jesus Christ and with the Church. It is the commitment to “walk with the Lord.” Through baptism, he said, the church creates community and maintains accountability. The church staff recognizes that many of New Song’s members, like many GenXers, come from broken homes and dysfunctional families, and they are drawn to the church because they feel uprooted and adrift in a chaotic world. “How many people feel really at home and cared for?” the senior pastor asked rhetorically. To be “at home and cared for,” in this and in many other contexts, means not only to feel safe and secure, but to have people for whom what one does actually *matters*—and, thus, to be accountable to those people. When families work the way they are supposed to, they create “home.” One of New Song’s highest priorities, then,

³⁷ One of New Song’s most refreshing traits is that it does not take itself *too* seriously: interjecting after the coffeehouse proposal, the senior pastor suggested the church might have to set up a support group for people struggling with caffeine problems.

is to provide that community and accountability to young singles and married couples through the church as a whole and through small groups in particular. While New Song seeks to achieve and maintain congregational unity, the church also emphasizes one-on-one discipleship and mentoring and support through small “care groups.” Often mentioned was the idea of “intergenerational” or “multigenerational” connections between older, experienced, members and younger members seeking guidance.

- e) Teaching, the senior pastor stressed, means “gaining roots in the faith so people stay and obey.” With an underlying goal of building community, such teaching encompasses six main components: obedience, church apologetics, practical living (e.g., cooking, car repair), advancement of Christians from “new Christians” to “mature Christians,” education in affinity groups (e.g., men, women, children, youth), and leadership training.

New Song is concerned with authenticity.

“Authenticity” is a word with many meanings, and it can refer to almost any dimension of the religious, but particularly to the ethical, the experiential, and the mythical. For the purposes of this study, Anthony Giddens’s definition may prove helpful to understand the term as it applies to New Song Church:

The moral thread of self-actualisation is one of *authenticity*...based on “being true to oneself.” Personal growth depends on conquering emotional blocks and tensions that prevent us from understanding ourselves as we really are. To be able to act authentically is more than just acting in terms of a self-knowledge that is as valid and full as possible; it means also disentangling...the true self from the false self....To be true to oneself means

finding oneself, but since this is an active process of self-construction it has to be informed by overall goals—those of becoming free from dependencies and achieving fulfillment. (Giddens, 1991, pp. 78-79)³⁸

Considering the emphasis on intimacy and accountability in one's personal experience with the divine at New Song, it might follow that goals and standards are seen as objectives at which to aim, rather than baselines against which one is to be judged and to be found wanting. In their rhetoric of "the walk with the Lord," New Song's clergy make it clear that they do not expect congregants to be perfect people, let alone perfect Christians—and they make it equally clear that they (the clergy) do not set themselves above the rest of the church, either as models or as judges. Pastoral preaching on marital difficulties and on homosexuality are clear examples of such an egalitarian model of ministry. At the same time, however, the church leadership holds itself to rigorous standards of moral fortitude, and although "deviant" or "struggling" members might not be expelled from the church, they would certainly be restricted from lay leadership positions until they demonstrated that they had overcome their problems to the satisfaction of the church's Elder Board and pastors. The objective, then, is to practice continual self-improvement and to achieve real-world results. Thus, in their explication of doctrine and ethics, the preaching pastors always seek out direct ways in which to apply the week's scriptural lesson to the "real-life" (outside Church) experiences and issues facing the congregation. In this way, Giddens might say, the clergy challenge churchgoers to discover their "true selves"

³⁸ This is by no means the only definition relevant to the sociology of religion; see, for example, Taylor (1992, as noted above) and Taves and Bender (2012, pp. 22-24), which explores how the term plays out in the context of secular values.

and to “disentangle” themselves from inauthentic and self-defeating “dependencies.”

This is not to say that everything is relative; indeed, evangelism at New Song is primarily concerned with setting a Christian example through personal witness—but not much through verbal testimony as through behavioral modeling. As a church, New Song is self-reflective rather than other-responsive (and tries to be non-judgmental, at least in its own self-perception). Consequently, the staff organization can be rather self-critical when it comes to evaluating the success or failure of ongoing initiatives. At the congregational level, one finds a wide range of small groups organized around people’s needs as they arise. Moreover—and here one recalls the specificity of the church’s mission—New Song not only does *not* try to be what it is not (a boomer church, a traditional church, a mainline church), but instead it is focused on what it is and what it believes it can or should be. The guiding questions at New Song’s ten-year vision-casting session were: “Can we...? Should we...? Will we...?”

Perhaps, then, the most salient religious dimension of “authenticity” is the mythical. One of the challenges implicit in living “authentically” is to construct a meaningful life-narrative. The language of the “walk with the Lord” connotes a narrative process even more strongly than does the language of “seeking” (which one also hears at New Song, but far less often), language often associated with boomer churches. To return to the description of New Song as “broken people trying to have church”—implicit in the phrase is an effort to overcome fragmentation in one’s life, or, in Mary Catherine Bateson’s words, to “compose a life.” Composing a life—

articulating authentic wholeness both in how one conducts oneself and in how one assigns (or finds) meaning in context and Cosmos—most often involves the expression and revision of personal narrative or autobiography. The experience of “becoming a Christian”—the conversion experience—offers just such an opportunity to reconfigure the past and future contours of one’s personal narrative. One of the greatest strengths of New Song as a church, then, is that it encourages new and mature Christians alike to consider their personal narratives, that is, not just to rediscover their lives *as narratives*, but also to engage continually with those narratives to recreate them in order to achieve a greater measure of authenticity.

New Song’s ritual/liturgical structure is flexible, providing for a wide range of human-divine interactions.

As part of their effort to ensure congregants are able to have personal relationships with Jesus Christ that are as authentic as possible, New Song provides for a wide range of contexts within which individuals and groups can commune and communicate with the divine.³⁹ Recognizing that there are different ways to talk to God, the church organizes worship in a variety of ways, and leaves plenty of time for spontaneous and extra-liturgical worship.

This flexibility is most directly apparent in the ritual dimension of the New Song religious community: a single service can make use of many different media

³⁹ Turner (2012, p. 139) characterizes this approach to the accessibility of the divine as an important feature of social secularization.

through which it facilitates worship and other forms of prayerful reflection, such as meditation. One medium—but not the only one—is the performance of rock and pop music that is familiar and accessible to Generation X. To characterize New Song as a “rock-n-roll church” (or worse, to look down upon “buster religion” because it does not incorporate “traditional” liturgical music) is to miss the point. At New Song, popular music is not an end in and of itself, a novelty for the sake of being hip and new; rather, the music is a critically important means through which the church expresses itself and worships the divine. In order to reach Generation X, the church uses MTV-style videos, comedy-improvisational skits, and Christian music (and not-so-Christian—New Song does not shy away from incorporating popular secular music, from Madonna’s “Material Girl” to Joan Osborne’s “One of Us,” if using such music helps to convey a broader message), as well as many other media. On Mother’s Day 1996, for example, the church’s first all-female worship band made its debut to general acclaim from the congregation.

Doctrinally, too, the church provides for a certain degree of big-tent theology within the core structure of its guiding mission and vision. As one lay leader told me, New Song tries to “major in the majors and minor in the minors”; that is, while the church stands firm on what it considers to be the key biblically-ordained teachings found in the Gospels, not only does it not tread on less clear, perhaps more debatable theological propositions, but it also discourages members from dividing along such lines of debate. One example of this is the question of alcohol consumption: there is a wide range of opinion, but members are largely tolerant of divergent views.

No doubt partially because of this diversity in religious expression and ritual, the New Song community is diverse across sociological and theological lines. Self-professed “liberals,” “moderates,” “conservatives,” and “fundamentalists” worship together, as does a socioeconomically diverse cross-section of 18-35 year-olds that one would be hard-pressed to find in the same room anywhere else. The New Song congregation dispels any preconceived notion of whom one would expect to be a churchgoer.

New Song’s organizational/social structure is flexible, providing for a wide range of interpersonal relations within the church.

New Song’s flexible organizational structure is perhaps a natural corollary to its flexible ritual structure. A number of staff members described the church as “staff-led” or “staff-driven.” There is an all-male Elder Board⁴⁰ with concomitant authority and responsibility typical of a non-profit board of trustees, but the vast majority of the decisions—both day-to-day and long-term—are taken by the church staff in general, and by the Executive Team in particular. Decisions that affect the overall structure and direction of the church, such as the annual budget and changes to the overall

⁴⁰ The gender restriction on eligibility for service on the Elder Board is the topic of ongoing, if muted, conversation. Current scriptural interpretation reads the Gospels to limit membership in church governance to men; at the same time, however, women hold other significant lay leadership positions, and the staff leader of the celebrations ministry (worship and liturgy), a member of the church’s Executive Team, is a woman. Apparently, strict biblical interpretation also requires that each elder be “the husband of one wife”; this rule is less strictly upheld, and there are single members of the Board. Interestingly enough, one of the most ardent defenders of the men-only rule, an older (pre-boomer) member of the Elder Board, was equally adamant that the church include singles on the Board.

mission statement, are approved by the congregation as a whole on the joint recommendation of the Elder Board and the Executive Team.

The life and direction of the church, then, greatly depends on its staff operations—and this is precisely where the organizational flexibility comes into play. The personnel are a tightly knit group, with close working quarters and frequent meetings, but individual staff members' responsibilities are each fairly discrete and self-sustaining. Perhaps the best way to describe the management structure would be to suggest that if the church organization were a living organism, it would have a highly porous exo-skeleton. Each staff member is free, within his or her sphere of responsibility, to initiate staff-led and lay-led projects; there is a certain degree of financial and operational accountability to the Executive Team, but the staff seems remarkably empowered to carry out their jobs as they see fit. To be sure, there is a certain degree of risk associated with this organizational model, namely that staff members may become isolated from one another—for example, budgets are already eyes-only to the affected staff member. However, very little goes on at New Song of which others are not aware, so as long as the staff remains at its current size the risk of internal isolation is relatively limited.

In the spiral-bound notebook given to new congregants taking the “New Song Inside Out” course (which provides new members with a comprehensive introduction to the community and its vision), one of “the non-negotiables of [its] ministry” is the belief that “a small group of Christians and pre-Christians is the best place for disciple-making, edification, equipping, accountability, and growth;” thus, the church

“will encourage all aspects of [its] ministry to be cell/team based.” Whether it is by organizing the staff and lay leadership into non-hierarchical “teams” rather than into a traditional authority structure, or by keeping up with the 40% of church members who are in “care groups” (long-term small groups, analogous to the Jewish *chavurah*) and “support groups” (goal-oriented counseling groups for specific needs), New Song ensures internal organizational fluidity and interaction among its congregants.

The team approach operates on the premise that just as there are many different ways to talk to God, so, too, there are many different ways “to have church”—from setting up the service each weekend to greeting people at the door, from teaching Sunday school, to feeding the homeless. Similarly, although the care groups are nominally open to anyone interested in making a commitment to join, many of them are organized around life stages—care groups for young couples, young parents, singles, divorcés (the single again), and the like—or around life processes—for example, a long-term program for engaged couples (known as “two-to-one”) and a care group where a long-married older couple mentors young couples on marital survival skills. These foci offer congregants a range of hooks with which to engage, but do not box them into one particular category; thus, one might choose from among one of the young marrieds groups, one of the young parents groups, and the older-couple/younger-couple mentoring group—or none of the above. In addition to the care groups, during any given week during my research, there were 75-100 people meeting in 15-16 support groups. Most focus on self-discovery, family/sexuality, and addiction; some of the most popular groups are “Search for

Significance,” “Managing Anger,” “Divorce Recovery,” and a group for women who have been sexually abused. These were not paltry spiritual-esque substitutes for similarly titled support groups in secular society. Support groups at New Song were fully engaged, comprehensive endeavors led by qualified and experienced facilitators. Where Alcoholics Anonymous might refer to “a higher power,” New Song’s groups specifically talk about “God”—but there is a clearly articulated distinction between care-giving ministries and evangelizing ministries: while the support groups certainly would not discourage anyone from exploring Christianity, they do not explicitly seek to make converts in the support group setting.

These teams and small groups offer Generation Xers and others a wide variety of ways with which to engage one another inside the New Song community. One interviewee, who observed that GenXers are much more open to sharing, cross talk, and blurring the boundaries between support groups and the rest of church, recalled how two young people who met in a support group found they shared a common interest in gardening and subsequently struck up a close friendship outside the group. Where Boomers tend to compartmentalize their “support group life” away from the “rest of life” and tend to remain quite goal-oriented in their approach to small groups, GenXers will as often as not go out for pizza *en masse* after a support group session, and broaden the support group relationships to include, for example, attending weekend services together. The key to success, though, is that the organizations and the facilitators who lead them are flexible and resilient enough to allow for a diverse range of relationships but still sustain a strong sense of community.

New Song accommodates both committed members and regular “church hoppers,” and draws upon resources from the outside world.

To this point, I have focused the New Song community as a somewhat self-contained organism; however, underlying the church’s straightforwardness, its concern with authenticity, and its ritual and organizational flexibility is an extremely dynamic relationship with the world beyond New Song. Perhaps partly because the church offices were in a restored house in San Dimas and the weekend services were in a junior high school gymnasium, I experienced New Song as tied intimately to the fabric of its surrounding community. It was a church without walls—or at least with relatively few walls.

New Song’s leaders seemed not only to be open to, but also to draw strength from, the “outside world.” Their model of Christianity is not one of separation or asceticism, but rather one of active engagement with the world, celebrating the best and trying to improve the rest. If GenXers respond to certain styles of music popular on the Top 40 radio stations and on the college alternative dial, then the church must minister to them where they are, and recognize the vast variety of sources from which young people draw spiritual sustenance. This approach is both authentic and pragmatic.

Within the specifically Christian context, too, New Song’s community is not exclusive; not only do staff members regularly attend services at other churches as well as at New Song, including a nearby Calvary Chapel, but the leadership seems almost to expect that many people who attend New Song semi-regularly or even

frequently are also participating in other forms and modes of Christian worship, both in other churches and in other non-church settings (such as listening to Christian radio stations). However, it is important to distinguish between the “church shopping” that is characteristic of “seekers” from what I am attempting to describe here. People who attend New Song in addition to other churches are not necessarily looking to make an exclusive commitment to a single institution (even if they have already made an exclusive commitment to Christianity); rather, they are “trying on” different churches to see which one “fits the best.” Rather, there is an implicit recognition that “church hoppers” (not shoppers) will regularly attend different churches that collectively reflect the complexity of their spiritual journeys.

This is not to say that New Song does not have a strong sense of the Church as the living Body of Christ; rather it is to say, in the words of the associate pastor, New Song seeks to be a strong institution “but not institutionalized.” In this context, the church attends to the outside world insofar as it maintains an active awareness of the changing nature of its present and future constituency. New Song was founded to reach what we now call “GenXers,” then young, single, and mostly white. Now New Song’s GenXers are crossing thirty and married—but still mostly white, despite the fact that just three miles north of Royal Oak Intermediate School’s gymnasium, the population has become mostly Hispanic. One of New Song’s more immediate goals for the ten years following the period of my fieldwork—in line with reaching unchurched Christians—was for the church community to resemble its neighborhood community racially and ethnically. Whether New Song is a church for singles or

married couples, for couples without children or for young families, for GenXers or for the fast-growing younger cohort of so-called “Millennials” are questions that the church faces not simply by looking inward at the congregation but also by looking outward to the surrounding neighborhood from which it draws its membership. GenXers and Millennials have different musical tastes; where GenXers are fascinated by technology, Millennials have come to expect technological innovation as a given. Singles and young married couples have expectations of sermon themes and of opportunities for socializing that are vastly different not only from one another but also from those of young families; in turn, young families have high expectations for childcare and educational programming. The New Song staff knows from hard experience that any failure to meet any and all of these sometimes seemingly incompatible needs leads to changes in the congregation’s demographic profile and causes some members to leave. Indeed, at the time of my fieldwork, interviewees reported a number of young families—particularly those with children over five years old—had left New Song during the years prior to my fieldwork there. The church was beginning to focus on improving its services to children and preteens, and fewer people were leaving. Nevertheless, as I learned from the congregation’s vision-casting session, many parents remained extremely concerned about the church’s progress (or lack thereof), and they were increasingly motivated to initiate more far-reaching changes and expansions in these areas. As a result, they make it a point to stay attuned to the complex fabric of their congregants’ lives in order to provide the kind of church community that meets most of the needs of most of the people most of

the time.

Such a task, daunting at best and overwhelming at worst, is particularly challenging for a church that tries to reach what is seemingly the most irreligious generation in America. However, New Song believes it has something special to offer the world, and to GenXers in particular: the clear vision of the Gospel. The extent to which the church engages with and draws upon the outside world, then, is intimately connected with the simple yet challenging message New Song presents. Their thematic variations and recapitulations, albeit for a new generation, nevertheless contain the clarion notes of an exposition that has persevered for two millennia.

3. Against secularization theory: Rational choice and the “new paradigm” confront seeker religion

Viewed through a lens privileging the role of religious organizations, whether rational choice theory (see, for example, Young, 1997) or “new paradigm” theory (Miller, 1997; Warner, 1993), the story of seeker churches and seeker services is one of religious revitalization through “authentic” religious experiences. This approach (Miller, 1997; Schwarz, 2000, 2004) focuses on religious organizations’ abilities to provide encounters with the sacred. By “appropriating contemporary cultural forms,” writes Don Miller, “new paradigm churches”—which include seeker churches—“are creating a new genre of worship music; they are restructuring the organizational character of institutional religion; and they are democratizing access to the sacred.” (Miller, 1997, p. 1) According to Miller, these churches are succeeding because “they offer people hope and meaning that is grounded in a transcendent experience of the

sacred” (Miller, 1997, p. 3). More concretely, Miller suggests, new paradigm churches meet four major contemporary American needs: the need for a sense of community; the need for a haven from an uncertain and scary world; the need for assistance with personal problems, such as addiction or marital strife; and the need for a sense of direction both personal and transcendent (Miller, 1997, pp. 184-185).

There is no question that looking through this lens at seeker churches reveals a great deal about them, but it is telling that the reference to community and safe havens comes only briefly at the end of Miller’s analysis. Although the new paradigm focuses more on religious producers while the secularization paradigm centers on religious consumers, both models seem to be looking from opposite ends along the same sight line of individualism. Like the old paradigm, the new paradigm fails to contend with ways that contemporary congregations like seeker churches are attempting, however subtly, to shift the ground of emphasis from transformation through personal self-fulfillment to transformation through interpersonal connection. Finding a sense of community or seeking refuge in a safe haven implies necessarily the formation of new types of collectives, which seeker churches actively aim to create. The distinction I wish to make is subtle but important: the new paradigm focus on the supply-side production of religious experience makes it difficult to question the premises underlying the organizations involved. Related to this is the presumption under rational choice models that religious organizations are competing for the loyalty of completely unchurched individuals, who are completely detached from religious commitments, and, thus, free to choose the organization with the most

appealing offerings. However, as even the earliest media reports on Baby Boomer spirituality observed, and as Steve Bruce has pointed out (Bruce, 1999, pp. 38-39), the ability to choose one's religion does not necessarily translate into sociological leaps of religious faith commitment. Choosing a congregation is more likely a matter of returning to religion than of starting from scratch, so disembedded individual religious actors often are re-embedding themselves rather than committing anew. The supply-side focus on production makes it difficult to determine whether new attendees are converts or returnees.

Another problem with new paradigm analyses is the tendency to itemize stylistic factors contributing to the success of particular groups rather than to explain the success in terms of an underlying theory or narrative. Hence, the similarities between the concluding chapters of Don Miller's (1997) study of new paradigm churches and Sidney Schwarz's (2000) study of new paradigm synagogues.

Table 3: "New paradigm" congregations

Miller (1997)	Schwarz (2000)
"Churches...that provide access to the sacred at a deep level are more likely to grow and expand in membership," more immediately and more powerfully to	"To spend time in [successful synagogues] is to find places where Judaism seems to matter more immediately and more powerfully to congregants than in most other places in the Jewish world."
"If ritual [is] removed from religious experience, ...then decline is inevitable."	"Participation in the [old-model] synagogue was experienced by many as shallow and superficial."
Rethink how to engender experiences of the sacred	Bring singable music into the worship service
Break down the dichotomy between mind and body in worship; experiment with worship styles and music...communicate to a new generation	Experiment with the prayer experience...movement, meditation, spontaneous prayer
Theology must emerge out of members' own experience of the sacred	Create a lay-led service; speak to the moment; share personal stories

The "models of success" approach was the one I took in my research at New

Song Church in 1996. To a certain extent, this type of market analysis fits Wuthnow's theory of "selective absorption," insofar as New Song is meeting a demand for "intimacy," "accountability," and "authenticity." Nonetheless, the conclusions leave us with at least as many questions as when we began, and little to no explanation for the emergence of the new paradigm church model in the first place.

Instead, I suggest, seeker services are sites at which religious forms are taken out of their "traditional" contexts and subsequently redeployed in a new guise privileging cultural affiliation over communal membership and the emotional over the ethical (see Hervieu-Léger, 1998). Put another way, the voluntaristic ego-centered social network replaces the membership-based community institution; and spiritual "experiences" are preferred to cognitive religious behaviors. Such a configuration preserves the individual religious consumer's freedom to choose the extent to which he or she wishes to participate in religious activities. Moreover, religious services in this model do not presume a committed or active worshipper; one is free to remain a skeptical spectator, and many services are designed to appeal precisely to such attendees. This expressive, indeed innovative, process leads to the creation of identities and social forms whose value lies in the extent to which they help the subject recreate an environment (in the sense of a life-world or *habitus*) within which he/she can feel comfortable, "at home."

To explore that process more fully and comparatively, the final two case studies turn to the seeker influence within American Judaism. Judaism's focus on identification and affiliation (belonging) make more visible communicative action

strategies within seeker religion that are not tied up with negotiation over doctrine in the same way.

SEVEN. INTIMACY AND EXPERIMENTATION: GLOBALIZATION AND THE RISE OF SEEKER JUDAISM

In this chapter, I take a broader view of seeker religion to further my challenge to secularization theory's imagination of the social specialization of religion, the restriction of "the religious" to limited aspects of individual and collective experience. I also make the case for studying religious congregations without privileging them as institutions. Studies of seeker religion have focused disproportionately on evangelical Protestant Christians, perhaps not only because they have been the pioneers in this field but also because they have publicized their efforts more widely.⁴¹ An early exception was *GenX Religion* (Flory & Miller, 2000), which includes a somewhat journalistic account of the Jewish religious service described below, called "Friday Night Live" (Gubkin, 2000). Moreover, congregation-based studies of Jews remain relatively rare, even though, as Lynn Davidman has observed, much research on Jews in America reflects "a deeply held bias towards institutional religious forms" of American Jewry. If, as she claims, "unaffiliated Jews" have become "a residual category in studies of contemporary Jewish life" (Davidman, 2000, p. 430), then we need to find ways to study the interstitial middle ground that unfolds on congregational sites with or without privileging them as institutions.

To that end, in the two case studies in this chapter, I attend both to intimacy and to pillarization, which refers to the "bundling" (or, frequently re-bundling) of

⁴¹ Also, perhaps, because as Cannell (2005, 2006) argues, the shared heritage of Protestant Christianity and secularization are mutually reinforcing.

religious collectivities to provide a coherent strategy for living, in ways that look both within congregations (at a specific service) and around them (by considering their reinvention). In this chapter I aim not only to broaden the field on which religious identity is studied (especially generational religious identity), but also to approach Jewish congregational studies in a way that moves unaffiliated Jews from the periphery to the center of the comparative enterprise.⁴²

1. The global context for contemporary American Judaism

American Judaism is a major component of global Judaism. Aside from Israel, more Jews live in North America than anywhere else in the world. Forty-one percent of the 13 million Jews worldwide live in the United States, and approximately 6% live elsewhere in the Americas—according to 2005 estimates, 372,000 lived in Canada, 185,000 in Argentina, and 213,000 elsewhere in Latin America. Though for many years the United States has had the largest Jewish population in the world, the decline in the U.S. Jewish population and the relatively high birth rate of Jews in

⁴² My comparison of Jewish congregational styles with evangelical Protestant ones follows in part from Abner Cohen's anthropological interpretation of "invisible organizations" (Cohen, 1974) and Herbert Gans's sociological understanding of "symbolic religiosity" (1994). Both Cohen and Gans note ethnic and religious organizations exhibit a wide range of structural similarities and perform analogous social functions. Gans explicitly allows for the possibility of "the consumption of religious symbols in such a way as to create no complications or barriers for dominant secular lifestyles" and suggests, "people who come as occasional spectators of, rather than participants in, religious worship ... may be prime practitioners of symbolic religiosity" (Gans, 1994, pp. 585-586). The effect is to provide an analytical framework within which one might probe Jewish evangelicalism and evangelical ethnicity for underlying common manifestations of concerns about marginalization, assimilation, collective consciousness, and cultural reproduction. The rubric of symbolic religiosity also permits a comparison of the roles of narrative and memory in the synagogue and church services, even when the notion of narrative is less explicit in the Jewish context and the concept of memory is less explicit in evangelical settings.

Israel is expected to result in Israel's Jewish population exceeding that of the United States sometime during the second decade of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the U.S. probably will continue to have the largest number of Jews outside Israel. For instance, there are more than twice as many Jews in the United States as in Europe. After the United States and Israel, the next largest Jewish population center, France, can claim less than 4% of the worldwide Jewish population. Of the other 90 countries around the world in which Jews live (down from 200 countries a century ago), only seven have a Jewish population greater than 1% of the worldwide Jewish population. As these numbers indicate, American Judaism plays a dominant role in global Judaism; at the same time, what happens in Judaism around the world directly affects the Jewish community in the United States.

Approximately 5.5 million people in the United States identify themselves as Jewish, but their importance in American life is disproportionately greater. There is a Jewish presence in approximately 4% of all U.S. households. While religious Judaism often is classified into seven streams—ultraorthodox, modern orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, and nondenominational—this religion-based typology belies the complexity of a tradition that is simultaneously a religion, an ethnicity, and a nation. Over the past century, in a manner that might be called global or transnational, the Jewish community in its various manifestations has evolved to become a significant player on the American and international religious, ethnic, and political scenes.

The year 2004 marked the 350th anniversary of Judaism in North America.

Jews have been part of North American life since long before the United States, Canada, and Mexico became modern nation-states. Many members of Christopher Columbus's crew are believed to have been Jews fleeing the expulsion and inquisition in Spain and Portugal; New Christians (Jews who converted to Christianity) and crypto-Jews (New Christians who secretly maintained their Judaism) formed part of the Portuguese settlement in Brazil. One hundred fifty years later, these Jews launched a wave of migration to the religiously tolerant Dutch colonies—Curaçao in 1651 and New Amsterdam in 1654. A second, somewhat larger group of Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States from Germany in the early nineteenth century. From 1880 to 1920, the largest wave of Jewish immigrants to the United States fled persecution and socioeconomic instability in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. Subsequent patterns of Jewish immigration to the United States are smaller in scale but no less striking: Jews fled Nazi-occupied Europe to Latin America in the late 1930s and early 1940s; survivors of the Shoah moved to the United States after World War II, and Iranian Jews moved to Long Island and Los Angeles after the revolution of 1978-1979. Jews from the former Soviet Union arrived in the early 1990s; and, in the wake of severe economic crises, Argentinean and other South American Jews migrated north in the early twenty-first century. As of 2000-2001, 8% of the adult Jewish population of the United States was born abroad; two-thirds of that group came from the former Soviet Union and half of the remainder from just three countries: Israel, Canada, and Iran.

The first wave of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who arrived in the New World

were, in a sense, continuing a 1,500-year diaspora in search of religious freedom and socioeconomic stability. Their travel to North America was made possible by European colonial expansion. The second and third waves of German and East-Central European Jews were mostly economic migrants, spurred by the aftereffects of the Industrial Revolution and the birth-pains of the modern capitalist nation-state. The most recent waves—Jews from post-World War II Europe, Iran, and the former Soviet Union—have been refugees and stateless migrants.

The history of Judaism in the United States is in many ways an account of Jewish ambivalence about the homogenizing tendencies of both nationalism and globalism. American Jews—along with many of other faiths—have resisted the extreme tendencies of American nationalism, appealing not only to their right to ethnic difference but also to the universalistic ethical demands of their religious tradition. By the same measure, American Jews have resisted the totalizing strains of globalism, insisting on their religious, ethnic, and national particularity.

The very term “pluralism” was coined by an American Jewish philosopher, Horace Kallen, as was its counterpart, the term “melting-pot,” coined by Israel Zangwill (for other prior related uses of the word, see also Bender & Klassen, 2010, pp. 6-8). Both words entered the lexicon shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, as immigrants arriving from East-Central Europe coped with conflicting impulses to assimilate into American society and to preserve their religious and cultural heritage. That American Jews developed the basic vocabulary of integration, acculturation, diversity, and difference suggests that the Jewish experience in the

United States has become paradigmatic. At the same time, Jews in the United States have had to make fundamental choices about how to balance the demands of American society (sometimes secular, sometimes Christian) with Jewish traditions and expectations. How to be Jewish in the United States? How to be an American within Judaism? And what about Israel? In many respects, one's response to those competing questions is more revealing than that particular person or group's affiliation with a particular stream of religious Judaism.

American Judaism—specifically American religious Judaism—has long been a proving ground for global Jewish religious innovation. The non-orthodox Reform and Conservative movements, though born in Germany and Hungary, grew to maturity and dominance in the United States; the World Union for Progressive Judaism (Reform) and Masorti Olami (Conservative) depend on U.S.-based support for their global efforts. The organization called Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, pioneered its university outreach program in the United States and has since exported its model to Israel, the former Soviet Union, and South America. The American Jewish summer camp movement has outposts in Hungary (funded by Ronald Lauder, heir to his mother Estée's perfume fortune) and Ukraine (funded by the Conservative movement).

American religious leaders have helped to shape global Judaism, in particular rabbis such as Moshe Feinstein (ultraorthodox), Abraham Joshua Heschel (Conservative), Menachem Schneerson (Chabad-Lubavitch), Joseph Soloveitchik (modern orthodox), and Stephen S. Wise (Reform). Jewish liturgical music and

popular songs composed by Americans, such as Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, Debbie Friedman, and Craig Taubman, are sung worldwide.

Perhaps the most famous American Jewish export is the Chabad-Lubavitch network of synagogues, kindergartens, and community centers, which now span the globe from Norway to Namibia to Nepal. This Chassidic outreach movement, based in Brooklyn, New York, seeks to create and serve Jewish markets throughout the world while adhering at all times to an ultraorthodox vision of religious Judaism. The most visible sign of Chabad's global influence came in 2000, when the Chabad-sponsored Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS secured official recognition from the Russian government and installed its rabbi as the Chief Rabbi of Russia, pushing aside the long-established Russian Jewish Congress and the Federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Russia. Moreover, every year, Chabad of Nepal sponsors a Passover meal for as many as fifteen hundred backpackers in the Himalayas.

The processes of cultural detraditionalization and retraditionalization associated with late modernity have had an especially strong influence on Jewish life in America and Europe. The combination of migration and assimilation affects any community; but the genealogical break of the Holocaust meant that the post-war generation largely was cut off from what had been centuries of local and regional Jewish customs and practices. As both historians and anthropologists have noted, Jews seeking to rebuild their religious lives turned to the formal legal tradition, preserved in written texts, to fill the cultural vacuum. One result was the loss of local

variation—perhaps inevitable because of the destruction of the actual physical places—in favor of a global uniformity of practice. Another result was the polarization of religious Judaism: as orthodox Jews sought new legal strictures to take the place of vanished customs, non-orthodox Jews took advantage of the cultural vacuum to reinterpret Jewish law, borrowing customs from Jewish communities around the globe. For example, for centuries, East-Central European Jews banned rice and legumes during the Passover week in addition to the five types of leavened wheat, whereas Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jews legislated no such limitation. The Conservative/Masorti movement—largely populated by East-Central European Jews—has adopted the latter practice and lifted the ban on rice and legumes, dismissing it as merely a folk custom unsupported by the law.

Nowhere is globalization more a part of the American Jewish experience than in the development of what Reform Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise called “Minhag America” (American school of practice). American Jewish ritual and music, particularly in non-orthodox settings, has moved far beyond the confines of Ashkenazi (East-Central European), Sephardi (Mediterranean), and Mizrachi (Middle Eastern and Iranian) groupings. “Yemenite steps” were introduced into American Jewish “Israeli dancing” in the 1950s and 1960s, and Ugandan Jewish melodies have been adopted in synagogue services in 2004.

The first major cultural importation in late twentieth century, American Judaism was the legitimating of Sephardi and Mizrachi liturgical and musical practices. However, this was not so much a globalizing trend as a multicultural trend;

that is, the Sephardi and Mizrahi traditions were acknowledged as valid Jewish traditions in and of themselves, but they were not integrated into the liturgy alongside Ashkenazi practices, nor were Ashkenazi practices adopted in Sephardi and Mizrahi congregations. In the past twenty years, however, synagogues such as Los Angeles's Sinai Temple have been host to an often awkward integration of Iranian and European cultural practices, and both Sephardi and Mizrahi congregations have adopted European orthodox norms not found in their native traditions, such as a divider separating men and women.

While ethnomusicologists such as Jeffrey Summit (2003) have documented the history and breadth of Jewish musical folk traditions worldwide, it is only a relatively recent development that the full range of these traditions has found a place in the American synagogue. Much of the shift is due to the expansion of the religious Jewish summer camp movement, beginning in the late 1960s; campers who learned exciting new ways of praying and singing began to demand that their home synagogues incorporate these innovations. As synagogues themselves became sites for liturgical and musical experimentation, congregants looked further and further afield for inspiration, in many cases not limiting themselves to traditionally Jewish modes. Thus, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City has incorporated into its Friday Night Shabbat service music from the Sephardi tradition, the (Muslim) Sufi tradition, and from cultures as varied as Turkey, Bulgaria, Holland, Israel, and Pakistan. These melodies are mixed and adapted without regard to maintaining any regional or ethnic integrity, so it would not be inaccurate to suggest Minhag America

is in fact a global school of practice.

2. “Willow Creek for Jews,” I thought to myself as I walked out of the Friday night Sabbath service....

In the context of this globalizing history, in May 1998, Sinai Temple, a well-established Conservative Jewish congregation on the west side of Los Angeles, inaugurated a monthly Friday evening Shabbat service intended to attract Jews between the ages of twenty-five and forty who were unaffiliated with a synagogue. The event, designed especially to attract singles, incorporates a revamped prayer service featuring a live rock band, followed later in the evening by Israeli folk dancing, additional concerts, lectures, and food. From a turnout of four hundred at the first service, Friday Night Live now draws approximately fifteen hundred each month. For a number of years beginning in November 2000, Friday Night Live’s musical director Craig Taubman led a monthly Saturday morning service, called “One Shabbat Morning,” at Adat Ari El of Studio City, California, another long-standing Los Angeles-area Conservative synagogue. The morning service incorporated much of the hymnody of Friday Night Live, with additional new melodies alongside the traditional liturgical melodies.

December 2003: Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, California

Toward 7:00 pm on Friday evening, traffic starts to thin out. Wilshire Boulevard east from Westwood moves quickly, until about a block west of Beverly Glen. Along an upscale stretch of Wilshire, lined by expensive high-rise

condominiums, the massive structure of Sinai Temple takes up an entire city block. Approaching the corner of Wilshire and Beverly Glen, the right lane backs up as cars line up and jockey for position. The line stretches around the corner, down Beverly Glen, and then snakes right for another half-block. Here, a uniformed security guard asks me to open the trunk of my car, checks it cursorily, and waves me into the underground parking garage. I wind down three or four levels, motioned along by security and parking personnel, until one of them points me to a stacked space, so I leave my keys in the driver's seat and make my way toward the elevator.

When the elevator doors open onto the first floor, I can already hear a dull roar of voices. As I turn the corner to walk toward the foyer, I am confronted with a crush of people—hundreds of twenty-, thirty-, forty-, and even fifty-somethings—waiting for the service to begin. The smell of over-enthusiastic perfume and cologne is overwhelming. Women tell me that the scene in the women's restroom before and right after services is like a high school prom. The men's room is quiet, focused, as if before the big game.

On one side of the foyer, perpendicular to the doors to the sanctuary, a long table, covered with a white tablecloth, offers slick postcards and colorful flyers advertising upcoming events. The volunteers sitting behind the table are usually women in their mid- to late-thirties, friendly, but not aggressive.

As the doors open, three or four volunteer ushers—here an even mix of women and men—distribute translation/transliteration booklets to assist non-Hebrew readers in following the text in the prayer book, and they make sure that men have

their heads covered, either with a hat or with a *kippah*. Some men, perhaps one in six or seven, wear their own *kippot*, usually a small, colorful knit one bobby-pinned to their heads, signaling they are frequent-enough synagogue-goers to invest in their own collection. A smaller number seem to have dug out a white or blue satin bar mitzvah or wedding souvenir. I enter the sanctuary to the klezmer-rock sounds of professional musicians vamping on electric and acoustic instruments.

The cavernous sanctuary seats nearly 2,000 people in rows of fixed pews, and a temporary wall can be raised to provide seating for 500 more. People enter the sanctuary one at a time or in groups of friends. Couples—and clusters of two or three couples—are readily apparent. As I move forward toward the front of the sanctuary, it is almost immediately apparent that those sitting in front are more focused on the service, while those choosing to sit in the back of the sanctuary have come more for social reasons, and often continue to chat during the service.

Rabbi David Wolpe, the senior rabbi of the synagogue, stands just inside the entrance, welcoming the arrivals. His manner and style of dress make him indistinguishable from worshippers in their casual-hip outfits, so a first-time attendee might not even realize, until the service begins, that she or he has been greeted by the rabbi.

The front of the sanctuary features a raised bimah, or proscenium, with a massive closed ark holding the Torah scrolls. A fixed podium—that appears to be meant for the cantor—takes up the center of the stage. Another fixed podium, apparently for the rabbi, takes up the front of stage right. The stage left area is filled

with the accoutrements of the band—double bass, clarinet, electric piano, and drums.

The formal proceedings begin when the worship leader, Craig Taubman, singing in Hebrew, invites the congregation to join him. For anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of the 90-minute service, the congregants sing buoyant, inspirational songs based on Psalms 95-99, the traditional setting for Kabbalat Shabbat, the introductory segment of the service welcoming the Sabbath.

The division of authority among pulpit clergy in non-orthodox synagogues can take many forms; in this rather unusual instance, Taubman combines the pace-setting direction of the prayer leader, with the musical direction of a cantor. Rabbi Wolpe provides formal rabbinic authority, offering commentary and reflections at various points throughout the 75-minute service. Indeed, after the opening singing, Rabbi Wolpe—clad fashionably in a casual suit and a dark shirt (no tie), or simply a black turtleneck—steps to the center pulpit, which he will share with Craig Taubman during the service. He makes a few opening comments, setting the tone of the next hour with references to the public issue of the week or to the theme he plans to develop in his sermon. This segment lasts no more than two or three minutes, followed by Lecha Dodi (“Come, My Beloved”), the traditional sixteenth-century hymn welcoming the Sabbath Bride. Lecha Dodi has been set to numerous melodies over the centuries; the Friday Night Live version, composed by Craig Taubman, is an upbeat Dixieland-meets-klezmer rendition that has been copied for use in synagogues throughout the U.S.

Following Lecha Dodi, the service proceeds in a fixed-ritual format from

which the service leaders rarely, if ever, deviate, as it depends on the formal liturgical structure of the Sabbath evening prayers: a quick and untranslated recitation of the Chatzi Kaddish prayer marking the transition from the Kabbalat Shabbat service to Ma'ariv, the evening service. Craig Taubman then leads the congregation through his settings of the call to prayer, the Barchu, the statement of faith, the Sh'ma, and the song of praise, the Mi Chamocha. Most of the melodies to which these prayers are sung have been composed by Taubman specifically for this service; only the Ve-Ahavta, a paragraph from the Book of Deuteronomy, which immediately follows the Sh'ma prayer, is cantillated by the congregation to the traditional melodic trope; this text, and this melody, is one of the first that all Hebrew School students learn in their classes, so it is perhaps the only melody with which virtually all of the attendees, even first-timers, are familiar. Consistent with practices in Conservative synagogues, none of this material is translated or read in English, but a translation/transliteration booklet produced especially for Friday Night Live contains all the selections used for the service. At this point, Craig Taubman leads the congregation in singing his version of Hashkivenu, the evening prayer for peace, which he has set as a lullaby-like round. The mood becomes upbeat with V'shamru, a text about the Sabbath, sung to a popular tune written in the 1960s by a Los Angeles-area rabbi, Moshe Rothblum, for campers at the Conservative movement's Camp Ramah.

The beginning of the Amidah, (the standing prayer) the centerpiece of the Jewish liturgy, usually involves a softly spoken or sung meditation. Taubman's version of the Adonai S'fatai meditation, however, is a repetitive niggun, or mantra-

like melody, that begins slowly and builds in intensity and speed. As the sanctuary falls restlessly silent for the remainder of the prayer, which is said silently, Rabbi Wolpe instructs the congregation to begin on page 35b of the Sim Shalom prayer book—this is the page mentioning the matriarchs in addition to the patriarchs, an innovation not found in orthodox prayer books, nor on page 35a.

At the conclusion of the Amidah, Rabbi Wolpe delivers his sermon, a short but usually rhetorically powerful meditation lasting no more than 10 minutes. Sometimes, he previews or recaps longer Saturday-morning or holiday lectures; other times he takes a particular idea or quotation and builds on it.

At the same time that seeker messages do away with internal/exclusive language of chosenness, they universalize the message so everyone can be included; Wolpe's sermons are no exception. A word-count analysis of Wolpe's sermons—comparing four years' worth to written sermons published during the same period in the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*—reveals his talks at Friday Night Live make far more frequent use of universalizing words (e.g., know, believe, love, truth, and world). This extended to universalizing tendencies within Judaism: Wolpe's sermons far more frequently mentioned “Judaism,” “people,” and “Jews,” whereas the written sermons referred more to “Torah,” “God,” and “Israel.” Words suggesting a communitarian orientation and a sense of obligation also appeared far less frequently in Wolpe's sermons, (e.g., must, family, law, together, mitzvah, and our). There were outliers, of course: Wolpe used the particularist “Shabbat” more frequently, while the written sermons used the language of “spiritual” more

frequently.

After the sermon, everyone rises for the Aleinu, a concluding prayer sung to the traditional melody but with a jazzy walking bass-line added to its melodically more upbeat second paragraph. After the mourner's Kaddish, recited during periods of mourning and on the anniversary of a close relative's death, Rabbi Wolpe reads the announcements, usually summarizing the advertising postcards and flyers available outside. Emphasizing the services' informality, Wolpe and Taubman banter with one another during the "announcements" portion of the service, teasing each other about upcoming events in which they have a personal or professional interest. To end the service, Craig invites the congregants to move toward the front and center of the sanctuary and to put their arms around one another, as he begins with his own setting of Adon Olam, the traditional closing hymn, and continues with one or two upbeat tunes familiar to most of the congregation.

3. Undermining the religious/secular divide (if there ever were one)

Viewed through the lens of Secularization Theory, seeker churches in general and seeker services in particular tell one part of the story. According to this reading of the narrative, the secularization of society results in secularized religiosity that appeals to secularized individuals. At Willow Creek, for instance, the absence of a cross from the main sanctuary reflects the intent to reach non-attenders turned off by overt religious symbols (Balmer, 1992; Hoover, 2000). Since individuals are trending toward disaffiliation from religious groups, membership loses importance and the

question of attendance is paramount. According to the secularization paradigm, seeker churches are a last-ditch effort to keep disaffiliating individuals interested in religion; thus much of the “Gee, whiz!” tone that characterizes much of the earliest reporting on places like Willow Creek reflects the observers’ astonishment at their counter-intuitive success. A nuanced secularization-based view probably would capture the deeply privatized nature of the seeker church experience and the inner-directed emphasis of the “relevant” sermons and messages. However, such an analysis probably would focus more on the absence of concern for a large-scale impact on the broader society but miss other consequences beyond the walls of the congregation.

Robert Wuthnow’s refinement of secularization theory into a theory of “selective absorption” offers a telling example. Wuthnow proposes a reconceptualization of privatization, in which, according to the old version, “religion shrinks into the private realm and then continues to decline” (2003, p. 13). He argues instead for a theory of “selective absorption,” under which

“religious organizations do not respond passively to social conditions but negotiate with their environment ...by identifying new opportunities in their surroundings and developing programs to take advantage of these opportunities. ...[Religion] tries to take or incorporate activities that are being done by other organizations but perhaps being done badly or at levels below public demand.” (2003, p. 14)

Wuthnow suggests selective absorption depends on three conditions: that there be demand, that there be a “precedent” for religious involvement in meeting that demand, and that non-religious organizations have “some weakness” preventing them from meeting the demand. However, this theory runs into difficulty at a place like

Willow Creek or Saddleback Church. Many of the activities taking place there—book clubs, support groups, and sporting teams—are new arrivals to the religious scene and thrive there in spite of many opportunities for similar activities in non-religious contexts. Thus, it is difficult to characterize a shift in activities from an imagined secular sphere to a religious one, even as individual participants do make that realignment.

The evidence of such activities implicitly challenges Secularization Theory's imagination of the social specialization of religion, the restriction of "the religious" to limited aspects of individual and collective experience. Focusing on theology can lead to a false separation between the religious sphere and non-religious sphere. A Conservative rabbi once criticized Friday Night Live to me by asking, "Why should people go to Friday Night Live? You can get better music somewhere else, you can get better comedy somewhere else, and you can get better Judaism somewhere else, so why should you go to Friday Night Live?" This criticism assumes a separation between the religious (Judaism) and the secular (music and comedy), which may or may not apply in the lives of seekers, whether Jewish or Christian. Others have observed the appeal of evangelical religion is that faith is not seen as something apart from daily life. The same is true for the personalist Judaism preached at Friday Night Live, which seeks to incorporate what one hears or feels into the fabric of the everyday. People want to carry those feelings out into the world with them, and they can do that by reading the rabbi's weekly e-mail or by purchasing the Friday Night Live CDs and playing them in the car. The ideologies of Friday Night Live and the

megachurches reject the demarcations between the sacred and the secular.

To be sure, Friday Night Live's approach to seeker religion is somewhat different from that found at Willow Creek or Saddleback. However, the key distinction is not religion, but rather generation. As the case study of New Song indicates, Generation X seeker services require a different kind of approach from seeker services aimed at Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers believe the moral imperative was to be true to oneself, and their religious styles continue to reflect this individualistic approach to religious belief, practice, and ethics. Key to much of Boomer morality is a relatively existentialist approach to values, one in which each individual is responsible for generating and living by his or her own moral code. In the Baby Boom context, therefore, seekers might be understood to be those Baby Boomers who are looking for religious groups whose values coincide best with their own. By contrast, as anthropologist Sherry Ortner has observed (Ortner, 1998, p. 418) many popular studies of Generation Xers suggest that they tend to reject this individualistic morality as hypocritical, charging that many Baby Boomers have failed to live up to the ideals they claimed for themselves in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see, for example, Howe & Strauss, 1993). Thus, many GenXers refuse to lay claim to moral authority as individuals; at the same time, however, they are disinclined to internalize the moral values of others, such as the values espoused by religious groups. Rather, many GenXers are content to be value consumers, picking and choosing from among various offerings without necessarily identifying with or adopting any of them as their own. In a sense, religious groups successful with

Generation X are those which have become value producers and who actively market those values through advertising and other state-of-the-art communication tools, such as large-screen videos, contemporary music, innovative modes of expression (dance, visual art), and the liberal use of current cultural references in sermons and commentaries.

Understanding Generation X seeker services requires an accounting not only of belief, but also of practice and emotion. Privileging belief over practice and emotion leads to focusing on the apparent incompatibilities between the collectivist tenets of orthodoxy (regardless of religion) and the fluid individualism predominant in twenty-first century post-industrial society. However, within Judaism, practice is at least as important as belief, if not more so, and emotion—specifically trust and security—is at the core of both tradition and intimacy. The creators of Friday Night Live and One Shabbat Morning hope congregants will “feel at home” in the Jewish tradition, just as contemporary models of romantic and marital partnership assign greater value to the sense of intimate familiarity than to the external factors that characterized “a good match” a century ago.

Seeker services like Friday Night Live raise important dilemmas for religious insiders: tradition vs. accessibility, quality vs. quantity, and prescription vs. ritual innovation, among others. There are debates between those who claim to defend “authentic” Judaism and those who argue Jewish worship should be more accessible to people for whom Hebrew is not a familiar language and to people for whom Jewish prayer is not a familiar practice. There are debates over what Ezra Kopelowitz calls

the “logic of souls” versus the “logic of numbers,” that is, whether it is more important to provide fewer people with a richer spiritual experience or to attract as many people through the doors as possible (Kopelowitz, 2001). Finally, there are arguments over ritual: whether it is crucial to keep to established forms refined over centuries or to introduce new ways of praying together or new ways of being religiously Jewish together.

We can translate these “Jewish binaries” into familiar and well-rehearsed anthropological or religious studies binaries: official/elite religion vs. popular religion; individualism vs. communitarianism; and fixed vs. porous boundaries. Without discussing these in detail, I would like to suggest further exploration of these binaries does not move us forward in understanding how these new services work. These binaries do not address individual agency—the extent to which each congregant in the modern world is free to make his or her own spiritual and liturgical choices, whether as producers or as consumers. Moreover, these binaries do not take into account the extent to which individuals have become their own producers, brokers, and purveyors of cultural knowledge.

Instead, I suggest we turn to some of the key characteristics of the seeker religious experience. The first is intimacy. Here, following Anthony Giddens, I associate the notion of intimacy with that of the “pure relationship,” which “refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions

for each individual to stay within it” (Giddens, 1992, p. 58). Thus, intimacy is not measurable in terms of numbers, but it is measurable in terms of a concept, such as intimacy with God, interpersonal intimacy, or congregational intimacy (my technical term for the touchy-feely).

The individual congregant at Friday Night Live or Willow Creek or New Song is offered a way to have a one-on-one relationship with the Divine; as a result, as Turner notes, “divine forces are no longer ineffably remote and mysteriously distant” (Turner, 2012 p. 139). At Friday Night Live, this reflects Rabbi Wolpe’s personalist approach to Judaism, for which he credits Martin Buber. For Rabbi Wolpe, the greatest reward one can expect from God is a “moment of connection,” or “closeness to God.” For others, intimacy comes to the fore most obviously through music. One participant at “One Shabbat Morning,” a Saturday morning seeker service developed by Taubman for another Los Angeles-area synagogue, told me, “the music is great, and because the music is great I can have spiritual experience. I am not being told how to have spiritual experience. I have been given music that I can then use to have a spiritual experience, and so it happens.” The woman who said this to me believes music allows her to achieve an intimacy with God that she simply would not get through any other medium. The easy accessibility of this intimacy, though a feature of modern liberal religion, is further evidence, at least for Turner, of social secularization: “the ineffable hierarchy of sacred beings is being eroded by a communication system that has democratizing consequences, and the religious becomes domesticated and tamed as the sacred becomes ‘effable’” (Turner, 2012, p.

139).⁴³

In terms of interpersonal intimacy, there is no escaping that Friday Night Live is a singles scene. At its core, Friday Night Live is about young Jewish men hooking up with young Jewish women in order to produce Jewish marriages and Jewish babies. At early services, Rabbi Wolpe would give attendees a question to ask one another in place of a pick-up line, but he appears to have dropped this practice. At the December Friday Night Live, after the singing of Lecha Dodi, Craig Taubman pointed out Lecha Dodi is “a great opportunity for you to meet the person sitting next to you,” and he encouraged us to greet each other. As that happened, Rabbi Wolpe leaned into the microphone and joked, “Please do this but God forbid we should create community.”

For Anthony Giddens, a corollary of this new definition of intimacy is the idea that the modern world is characterized by detraditionalization, the displacement and disembedding of traditions and traditional modes of existence. This leads to precisely the kind of crisis of collective memory that sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger suggests is at the root of religious declension and revival. In response, subjects seek ways to recapture the basic sense of trust and security, they believe, characterized pre-modern existence (if it ever did). Moreover, seeker services like Friday Night

⁴³ Indeed, Jeremy Schonfield notes that whereas the underlying assumption of traditional (orthodox) Jewish prayer books is the uncertainty over whether prayers are heard, let alone responded to, and that one of the primary innovations of liberal Jewish prayer books is that “the speaker in progressive liturgies tends to address God in the expectation of being heard, without considering the theological problems associated with prayer or the philosophical doubts about the power of language that loom large in traditional versions” (2006, p. 343); in other words, they take for granted the assumption that the worshipper has direct, even one-on-one, access to the divine.

Live are gateway services, designed for individuals at the very edge of affiliation, so they have relatively little knowledge of an objective tradition with which to engage. The creators of Friday Night Live seek to construct a Jewish collectivity precisely by marketing to heretofore unaffiliated or disengaged consumers a revised narrative of Jewish memory, one that deemphasizes the Holocaust and Zionism and privileges medieval rabbinic philosophy, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Chasidic teachings, and twentieth century secular Jewish culture, all in a way that stresses affective accessibility over intellectual virtuosity. There seems an implicit awareness of Lynn Davidman's observation: "if people are free to achieve their religious identities from multiple sources, they are also free to employ their sense of occupying an ascribed status as an integral part of this project" (Davidman, 2007, p. 55). Indeed, as Friday Night Live's Rabbi David Wolpe commented, "My appeal to you is to rediscover what it is to be Jewish.... It's your story even if you don't know it" (Katz, 2001, p. 16).

Post-modern experimentation with social roles and fluidity of identity, often attributed to Baby Boomers, is of less importance to members of Generation X: rather, they seek the re-embedding of tradition and the establishment of expert systems in which they can place their trust. Danièle Hervieu-Léger calls this "the deliberate choice of invoking the authority of a tradition" and she attributes this choice to the "search for community ... [and] memories and longings" (Hervieu-

Léger, 2000, p. 165).⁴⁴ This re-imagining of memory comes out as well in the autobiographical memory of self-narrative, whether it is the evangelical conversion narrative or the synagogue speech on “how I came to realize that being Jewish is important to me.” Indeed, at One Shabbat Morning, Taubman’s Saturday morning analogue to Friday Night Live, the additional Musaf service following the reading of the Torah has been replaced by what its creators call the “Journey,” a short talk given by a member of the congregation that for all of the variety of speakers, always ends up being a conversion narrative about that person’s journey to his or her current Jewish commitments.

GenXers, perhaps, seek this existential security, in reaction to their feelings of standing at the edge of a “social and economic abyss” (Ortner, 1998, p. 423). Their quest does take on many different forms, but it takes place in community, with a sense of intimacy (as Giddens understands the term) that seeks the creation of “pure relationships” through which to restore some measure of trust. The examination of religious institutions like Generation X seeker services that are designed in part to serve as singles’ meeting-places—and thus to encourage the transmission of collective religious memory through physical reproduction of the religious group—may prove an ideal means of assessing the practical application of Hervieu-Léger and Giddens’s theories through the tripartite prism of belief, practice, and emotion.

Critics of the Willow Creek seeker service approach and Friday Night Live

⁴⁴ This certainly appears to be the case in the independent *minyan* movement, part of the Jewish emergent phenomenon described below.

have noted they are often perceived to be without “authentic” religious content—“church ‘lite,’” or “cheap grace”—or indeed absent of theology (see, for example, Kaczorowski, 1997, 2001; Pritchard, 1996) or absent of “meaningful” collective memory (by meaningful, these critics presumably mean narratives highlighting Holocaust and the State of Israel, which Friday Night Live sermons tend to ignore). Nonetheless, such criticisms rest on an assumption about what “authenticity” means, often either by defining it as the legitimacy accorded by tradition or by measuring it in terms of the strictness of the moral and ritual demands placed on congregants. To a certain extent, the services are successful because they successfully package religious values and present them to GenXer consumers without demanding that they internalize or otherwise actualize those values. Moreover, the successes of Willow Creek and Friday Night Live are often measured according to non-religious criteria: “large crowds and media praise” (Wall, 1997, p. 316). For some GenXers, these understandings of authenticity remain salient; however, for many others, something is authentic when its orientation is outer-directed, when rather than achieving, possessing, internalizing, or actualizing the “truth” or the “true self” within oneself, one participates in a “reality” that is larger than oneself, often without evaluating the “truth” of that reality. Thus, at the December Friday Night Live, Rabbi Wolpe addressed the latest Jews for Jesus campaign in Los Angeles not by engaging in a theological debate between Judaism and Christianity but by defending the “excellence of Judaism.” “If it is important to you that there be Jews in the world,” he said, “then figure out why it’s important to you and hang onto that.” This is a very different

message from the traditional Jewish anti-missionary rhetoric of doctrinal proofs and counter-proofs.

Observers of megachurches and megatemples like Willow Creek and Sinai also note they deemphasize social and political action. As Sargeant has noted, in their effort to appeal to as many people as possible, many so-called seeker churches by and large have abandoned potentially divisive “moral issues” in favor of “matters of cultural taste and style” (Sargeant, 2001, p. 214ff). Evidence of this may be found in the instant book *From the ashes*, a collection of essays by religious leaders in response to the events of September 11. In their essays, both Bill Hybels (Willow Creek) and Rick Warren (Saddleback) focus on strengthening the “authentic self” and on reinforcing close, loving interpersonal relationships, particularly with one’s family and friends. Like Warren and Hybels, Sinai Temple’s Rabbi David Wolpe stresses the interpersonal in his contribution to the volume: “we are people of broken and yearning hearts,” he writes “And of love” (Wolpe, in Beliefnet, 2001, p. 41). To be sure, the Conservative movement, of which Sinai Temple is part, on public policy matters other than those affecting the State of Israel, is less politically active than other streams of Judaism (see Mittleman, Sarna, & Licht, 2002). Leaders of both *Friday Night Live* and *One Shabbat Morning* have remained more circumspect than their peers, even refraining from direct Israel-related advocacy from the pulpit (at least until the Mideast crisis of March 2002).

Like the criticisms of “church lite,” assessments of public activism in mega-congregations presume that certain types of public engagement are normative; often

they do not consider the possibility that these groups may be developing *new* avenues of involvement consistent with GenX concerns about authenticity and relationship building. Partly reflecting this shift in volunteer preferences, the scope of social action programs contemplated in the questionnaire for the Hartford Institute's Megachurch Project heavily favors activities involving one-to-one service and local initiatives with clear, measurable outcomes (Thumma, 2000).

Finally, the Generation X seeker services I have seen, whether at Willow Creek, Friday Night Live, or elsewhere, all profess universalism as a question of collective ideology rather than collective theology. At their core, they reject metaphors of "chosenness" and separation. In attempting to reach those who are not (or not yet) religiously affiliated—many of whom have significant doubts about the isolationist tendencies of religion—the creators of Generation X seeker services focus more on what Judaism or Christianity says to the world, that is, the universal message of Judaism or Christianity that is important for an individual to know about and carry with him or herself. At Willow Creek, I attended a Generation-X service at which Jesus was mentioned twice and Starbucks was mentioned three times. Perhaps it was a coincidence, or perhaps it reflects the extent to which seeker ideology is presented less as an overarching philosophy of life than a personal trope that could conceivably be accessible to anyone. It also enables Generation Xers to be in the world in a way that does not require separation or isolation or a rhetoric of chosenness with which they are very uncomfortable.

4. Beyond the seeker paradigm: the Jewish emergent phenomenon

The success of seeker religion turned out to contain the seeds of its critique. The infrequency and inconsistency with which these models of success were replicated, as well as the inability to translate them meaningfully into organizational structure and congregational culture left many people frustrated. Indeed, it took Sinai Temple nearly seven years before it created membership opportunities designed for Friday Night Live attendees and reflective of their financial circumstances. For its part, New Song did build a permanent site for itself; when I returned to visit some years later, the sense of contingency that I thought so integral to its GenX identity was less present, overtaken by a sense of having settled down; seekers had become dwellers (see Wuthnow, 1998).

Even as attendance at Friday Night Live peaked above 1,000 in 2003-2004 and since then has settled just below that number, the past few years have witnessed an expansion of other expressions of Jewish religious life through the formation of new spiritual communities unbound by conventional expectations about the roles and parameters of a synagogue. These new organizations, led mostly by Generation Xers (born 1965-1983) and Millennials (born 1983-2000), crave spirituality but they aren't interested in rote rules or in lightweight worship. Instead, they focus on devotional experiences that move beyond the walls of the synagogue, build community, and, perhaps most of all, create what they call an authentic connection to their traditions and to God. Deemphasizing the twentieth-century themes of Holocaust memory and "Israel right or wrong," these new "Jewish emergent" leaders are formulating a

community-based spirituality through a return to Judaism's sacred pillars of Torah, prayer, and social justice. The term Jewish emergent highlights the phenomenon's similarities with a Christian movement known as the Emerging Church. Partly in response to seeker religion and the growth of megachurches, Christian theologians and pastors have united to create new spiritual communities based on ritual innovation, including a return to traditional liturgical forms, and a renewed commitment to social justice.

The first Jewish emergent community, though it was not labeled as such until early 2006, appeared in 2001: Kehilat Hadar, an independent minyan (prayer group) for twenty- and thirty-somethings on the upper west side of Manhattan. It could be argued that Jewish emergent was apparent as early as 1998, with the establishment of Storahtelling, an organization dedicated to the radical reconception of the ritual reading of Torah, a pillar of Jewish liturgy. However, Storahtelling did not establish itself as a new congregation-like community, but rather as an educational organization and performance troupe. Indeed, many analysts would argue the Jewish emergent phenomenon should not be limited to religious communities as such (see Windmueller, 2006); pioneering Jewish emergent organizations may be found among groups, especially those concerned with social justice, established as early as the late 1980s.

There generally appear to be three broad streams of emerging Jewish leaders and communities: independent prayer groups (minyanim), "parashuls" (analogous to parachurches), and congregational communities of practice. The minyanim (prayer

groups) tend to be organized around lay-led Sabbath worship, while the parashuls are led by charismatic entrepreneurs creating connections beyond traditional institutional boundaries; leaders of the third type, whether they admit to it or not, are reinventing or replacing the synagogue. While all three types attract unaffiliated individuals looking for more episodic individual spiritual expression, the independent minyanim and the new congregational communities of practice seem to be magnets for highly educated but disaffected Jewish summer camp and university program alumni.

Jewish emergent communities focus on the so-called “sacred pillars” of the world as expressed in the Mishnah (*Pirkei Avot*, 1:2): Torah, learning, and acts of loving-kindness. This is an explicit rejection of what is perceived by many to be the traditional suburban synagogue’s emphasis on Holocaust memory, ethnic-based support for Israel and Jews abroad, and fear of anti-Semitism as organizing principles of congregational life (for a somewhat milder version of this critique, see Hoffman, 2006, pp. 16-17). Instead, Jewish emergent communities create mission statements and other identity markers that focus on the sacred. For example, Kol Tzedek (“Voice of Justice”) in West Philadelphia “cultivate[s] the opportunity for people to experience Judaism through prayer, education, spirituality, and Jewish activism” (kol-tzedek.org). Jewish emergent leaders often stress this focus is a recovery of the fundamentals of Judaism. “My message was two thousand years old,” writes Rabbi Andy Bachman, co-founder of the Brooklyn Jews community. “No originality there; no cutting edge New Judaism; no “hip rabbi’ persona” (Bachman, 2006).

Many Jewish emergent communities deemphasize social action, understood as

charity that does not change underlying conditions, in favor of social justice, by which they mean redress of systemic injustice. As the Internet homepage of IKAR, a Los Angeles Jewish emergent community, puts it, “We believe that matters of the spirit are intimately linked to matters of the world, and that the Jewish community has a distinct responsibility to participate in social justice and tikkun, healing” (www.ikar-la.org). Another page exemplifies the blurring of conventional sacred and secular boundaries: “We know that serious, honest encounter with things that matter, like loneliness, loss, AIDS and poverty, as well as love, joy, fulfillment and peace, are the cornerstone of an authentic Jewish prayer life” (www.IKAR-LA.org).

Both Jewish and Christian emerging communities attend to the creative tension that arises when doctrine and intentional practice are given equal weight in organizing a community’s priorities. Rabbi Shoshana Leis, then of Congregation Tehillah in Riverdale, New York, describes it as having “Kaplan on my left and Heschel on my right.” Like their Christian counterparts, Jewish emergent communities are blurring the line between the sacred and the secular; they are ignoring traditional institutional boundaries to do their work wherever it is, especially in local urban neighborhoods. Put another way, the institutions are driven by actions, not defined by an address. Perhaps partly as a result, there is room for serious Jewish theology as the ground of both prayer and activism.

Relationship, not contract or program, is the driving metaphor for many Jewish emergent communities. As Rabbi Dov Gartenberg, who founded Panim Hadashot in Seattle, Washington, has written, “hospitality is making a huge come

back as a central religious ideal. The shared meal, the open door, the nonjudgmental acceptance, the care for the other is a central overarching aspect of a spiritual life” (Gartenberg, 2006). Much of the outreach and hospitality characteristic of Jewish emergent is reminiscent of strategies employed by Chabad-Lubavitch, Aish HaTorah, and other Orthodox outreach organizations. Hospitality is not exclusively an Orthodox trait, and when it is combined with a non-judgmental approach to personal religious practice and an attention to social justice not normally found in the ultra-Orthodox world, it becomes a potent spiritual practice with major implications for the way Jewish institutions engage with Jews of all kinds. Gartenberg himself has noted the difference between the Orthodox outreach approach and the perceived inhospitality of many mainstream Jewish organizations: “The feeling that the Jewish community (especially the non-Orthodox community) is unwelcoming and cliquish is very widespread and needs to be energetically countered to change the perception. Jewish outreach is most effective when Jews are accepted as they are and are provided an opportunity to learn and grow in their own way, at their own pace. This loving acceptance is why Chabad and other traditionally oriented Jewish outreach organizations meet with so much success;” ironically, this observation appeared in an open letter announcing Panim Hadashot’s dissolution due to an absence of support for “pluralistic Jewish outreach” (Gartenberg, 2007).

To some observers, the recent ferment may appear similar to the Jewish Havurah (*chavurah*, plural *chavurot*) movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. There are a number of key differences. First, synagogue-based *chavurot* and

minyanim typically were organized as part of a larger congregation, with which one had to affiliate in order to gain membership in the small group; the new Jewish emergent communities are entirely self-contained: they are the congregation, not one part among many. Second, the 1960s Jewish *chavurot* were far less concerned with traditional ritual practice: many *chavurot* were created to engender ritual freedom or, indeed, freedom from ritual. Almost all emergent groups devote considerable time and energy to some form of ritual worship, always defining and creating it for themselves. Jewish emergent groups, in particular, appear at first glance to worship far more traditionally than their Havurah movement forbears; in addition, whereas many *chavurot* produced their own prayer books, as of this date no Jewish emergent community has done the same. Second, from a broader sociological standpoint, Jewish *chavurot* were vehicles for a more individualistic seeker spirituality characteristic of baby boomers; indeed, their organizational heirs are church-based small groups, which often are found in synagogues as “Jewish journey groups.” Third, as Rabbi Andy Bachman, co-founder of the Brooklyn Jews community in New York City, has pointed out, today’s emergent groups are decidedly non-utopian in their pragmatic approach not only to social justice in an imperfect world but also to the instability and uncertainty that has come to characterize the post-boomer life-course (Bachman personal exchange 2006). The optimism that characterized much of the Havurah movement is largely absent in Jewish emergent.

The Havurah movement made great strides toward equality of the sexes in Jewish religious life, but gender—and now sexual orientation, gender identity, and

gender expression—are at the core of the Jewish emergent phenomenon in a different way. Despite having adopted the values and vocabulary of gender equality and LGBT inclusion over the past generation, many established Jewish institutions are not yet fully living out those commitments. By contrast, many, if not most, Jewish emergent communities are founded on values and cultures that inherently honor gender equality and sexual diversity. Paradoxically, their very centrality often renders these values invisible: gender and sexual identity are not frequent topics of conversation because they are cultural givens. The communities' frameworks are such that everyone a priori is an insider and knows the terms of connection in advance. (Of course, this is not to say that emergent communities are immune to sexism and heterosexism; indeed, those issues, if and when they arise, may prove harder to diagnose and address properly.)

This is not to suggest that emergent communities are expressing the feminization of religion and religious communities, still less a zero-sum transfer of power from one sex to another. However, it may be that what the Havurah movement was to second-wave feminism—the empowerment of women on the basis of their gender—Jewish emergent is to fourth-wave feminism: the collaborative empowerment of men and women together around shared spiritual and political concerns. The Jewish emergent phenomenon may well reflect an explicit indictment of the slow pace of progress in the traditional congregational and denominational structures, as well as an implicit dissent over the path of that progress. The critique that synagogues are like country clubs may not be solely a statement about

membership and privilege; it also may be a comment on the highly gendered (male) nature of the “club” model. The Jewish emergent shift from institution building to social networking and the de-emphasis on movement affiliation may be only part of the story: the flight from denominational labels and hierarchical leadership may not be merely the outgrowth of a generation of Jewishly educated young adults; it also may be a search for more fluid and collaborative organizational models that foster leadership by people across the spectrum of gender identities.

Still, the Jewish emergent phenomenon is neither singular nor unique. Research (Cohen, Landres, Kaunfer, & Shain, 2007) confirms substantial differences among the three broad streams identified in 2006: lay-led independent *minyanim*, clergy-led congregational startups, and what I termed “parashuls” (analogous to parachurches). And as sociologist Ari Y. Kelman reminded me in conversation at the time, what was happening in spiritual communities also was—and still is—happening elsewhere in Jewish communal life, in arts and culture, education, social justice, and myriad other spheres. The parallels to the Christian emerging church continue. Ryan Bolger, associate professor of church in contemporary culture at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, observed: “An embodied, rather than just a cognitive faith, has seeped into many parts of the Protestant traditions ...the snapshot in 2012 is a continued move away from enlightenment form of faith toward the postmodern—more arts, more bodies, more (eco)justice, flatter leadership; more community, less ‘church’” (Landres, 2012).

The specific practices of emerging spiritual communities—whether expressed

through independent *minyanim* like Kehilat Hadar and the Mission Minyan; newly formed synagogue alternatives like IKAR, the Kavana Cooperative, and Romemu; or entirely independent initiatives, like the Kavod House (now the Moishe Kavod House Boston) and East Side Jews—are slowly embedding themselves within the congregational establishment. This is visible in three main ways: individual experimentation with diverse approaches to spiritual practices, such as yoga, meditation, and bibliodrama (e.g., Storahelling); the establishment of beyond-the-walls initiatives and synagogue satellites; and organizational co-sponsorships connecting synagogues and emergent startups.

As the Kitchen’s Rabbi Noa Kushner observed, “What was once considered fringe in 2006 is increasingly accepted. Within a year of being in existence, the Kitchen was asked to co-sponsor or participate with twelve “establishment” Jewish organizations. Everyone knows things have already changed. It’s only a question of how the new ecosystem will develop” (Landres, 2012). In Los Angeles, an established synagogue (Temple Beth Am), a rabbi-led startup (IKAR), and an independent *minyan* (Shtibl) co-organize an all-night Shavuot observance every year.

Some of these changes are driven by generational transitions, including the rise of Generation Xers to community leadership and the arrival of highly educated Millennials. Danya Ruttenberg, now Northwestern University Hillel campus rabbi, co-founded the annual Jewcy retreat in 2001; it ran through 2005. Ruttenberg said: “For me (and I think for a lot of the people connected to those first retreats), [Jewcy] was the first time we managed to integrate Judaism and the rest of our lives (activism,

alternative culture, non-traditional identities, etc.) in really deep ways. ...’01 was the year the Xers got old enough to create their own Jewish expression” (Landres, 2012). However, it remains to be seen what will become of emerging spiritual communities as their constituencies age out of their 20s and early 30s, according to both Claire Sufrin, visiting professor of modern Jewish thought at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and Rabbi Aaron Spiegel, former board chair and CEO of Los Angeles- and New York-based Synagogue 3000/Next Dor. Jeremy Burton, a co-founder of New York’s Darkhei Noam, an independent minyan, noted that the community had adapted in response to its shifting demographics, adding, for example, both a *chevra kadisha* and programming for young children (Landres, 2012).

Broadly understood—within and beyond the synagogue context—the Jewish emergent phenomenon reflects three large-scale transformations of identity and collectivity in twenty-first-century Jewish life. The first is the unbundling and relocation of activities previously “packaged” in a given institution, such as the synagogue. Much of the creativity—and the discomfort—associated with this shift is that it represents the end of mass loyalty to an imagined communal center. Jewish emergent practice is taking place elsewhere, and not just on a one-time basis. Rabbi Menachem Cohen, founder of the Mitziut Jewish Community in Chicago, commented, “We have choices. We talk now of integrating our Jewish values into social and environmental justice. We find God while harvesting organic potatoes and celebrate Shabbos at Occupy Chicago” (Landres, 2012).

The second transformation, related to the first, is that the organizing principle for collective action is now the interpersonal, relational dynamic rather than the institutional framework; as Turner rightly notes, “authority rests in the local and specific act of communication rather than in a principle of hierarchy” (Turner, 2012, p. 151). In the emergent context, the guarantor of an organization’s long-term impact is neither real estate nor an endowment, but rather its network resilience. Nowhere is this truer than in the context of lay-led independent minyanim, which tend to be all-volunteer groups that use borrowed or rented space for Shabbat and holiday services. Relationship capital, rather than economic capital, sustains independent minyanim. To that end, their success is not tied to organizational longevity, but rather the strength of social bonds connecting their stakeholders. As Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, cofounder of Kehilat Hadar and Mechon Hadar in New York, argued, “If a *minyan* provides intensive, real connection and [a] davening community, but then fades, isn’t that itself a success, perhaps more so than a sustainable but mediocre alternative?” (Landres, 2012).

The third transformation is the bundling (and rebundling) of activities and practices into new institutions that reflect contemporary realities and meet the needs of the individuals they engage and serve. “Integrating Judaism and the rest of our lives (both in language and as a goal) is more normative now,” observed Kavana’s Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum. “...The whole field has absolutely shifted over the past decade. I’m seeing the work of the emergent groups not only building strong local Jewish communities in particular cities, but also trickling into the way that

mainstream Jewish institutions are thinking, speaking, programming, and acting” (Landres, 2012). Rabbi Yechiel Hoffman, then executive director of LimmudLA, noted the influence of emergent organizations on the development of “newer community-driven organizations and networks that are not necessarily driven by religious ideology or needs,” but warned that despite their momentum, they remain financially insecure (Landres, 2012).

Some startups appear to be the result of current philanthropic attention to the newly identified life stage called “emerging adulthood” (officially 18-26, but more broadly the so-called “20s and 30s”), and through national initiatives (Moishe House and Synagogue 3000’s Next Dor) and local ones (Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington D.C.). Other self-organized and grassroots-funded efforts represent new cross-generational bundles of activities, especially those focused on the environment or food, such as Jewish urban farms and eco- and ethical kashrut. “For many of us who did not grow up in the ‘establishment,’ at Jewish summer camp, or Hillel,” wrote Tel Aviv-based nonprofit strategist Marni Mandell, “our participation in these indie *minyanim* gave us the ability to go and establish communities of our own. Many have asked whether we are looking for funding and how we will ensure sustainability, and our response is that as long as we are relevant, we don’t worry about either one” (Landres, 2012).

“I’m not really interested in whether we are a synagogue or not,” declared the Kitchen’s Kushner. “I like some synagogues plenty. What does interest me is trying to figure out what to call this new idea, so we can succinctly get across what is

continuous with synagogues and where we overlap with independent *minyanim*, *chavurot*, etc. We need a new term; we (many of us) have the ideas already” (Landres, 2012).

“We’re all standing on the threshold,” remarked IKAR’s Rabbi Sharon Brous, of Los Angeles, California, “but not necessarily of the old doors” (Landres, 2006a). Emergent resists easy definition: its postdenominational idiom reflects an attempt to find the essence of spiritual commitment, one free of labels or packaging. “We’re creating new doors, we’re creating windows, we’re knocking holes in the wall,” Brous continued. “We hear the voices from the outside differently than they may have been heard before.” And it is less about the “what”—the articulation of substantive new ideologies—and more about the “how”: the evolution of new organizing principles for spiritual communities and the integration of religious values and spiritual practices into individual lives. The emerging organizational models of twenty-first-century Jewish life continue to iterate and expand, drawing on one another’s lessons of struggle and success. Though its leaders exhibit a rich diversity of approaches and philosophies, they do share the values they practice and an emerging vision of religious commitment as a relational conversation aimed at spirituality in an intentional community.

EIGHT. BEING (IN) THE FIELD: DEFINING ETHNOGRAPHY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND CENTRAL SLOVAKIA

In his book *Ethnography through thick and thin*, George Marcus suggests the difference between sociological and anthropological reflexivity lies in their attitude toward difference—and social distance—between the fieldworker and the field. For sociologists, Marcus argues, reflexivity obtains in the acknowledgement that there is an irreconcilable, irreducible difference between the ethnographer and the subject of study. For anthropologists, however, reflexivity is found through locating the diffuse and diverse relationships that link the observer with the observed (Marcus, 1998, pp. 192-198).

This chapter reflects on the challenges of incorporating both perspectives into the study of the interstitial middle ground. Indeed, I write this on the basis of training in two disciplines, religious studies (where my focus is in the sociology of religion) and social anthropology. The experience of being an academic dual citizen makes me somewhat sensitive to the social manifestations of ideology, religious and otherwise. At the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I have been concerned with what we call “religion on the ground” (Smart, 1978), empirically observable expressions of religious belief and practice. My studies also have taken me to Oxford’s Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, where I was schooled to look behind social practices for underlying beliefs and ideologies. As documented in the case studies of the previous chapters, my fieldwork experiences have touched on the link between ideology and practice, and I believe that the social

anthropological study of that link highlights the importance of the ethnographer's position and self-analysis and the relationship between the fieldworker and the field.

On a summer's day in Oxford in 1998, I found myself trying to win over two rather skeptical reviewers of my proposal for extended fieldwork in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. I had proposed to study European identity among members of two local groups: the Rotary Club and the Jewish community. One of the reviewers asked me, "And just how is it that an American studying in England can ask Slovaks whether or not they feel European?" My hasty reply—the graduate student's stock answer—was that of course I would acknowledge this in my interviews and in my write-up.

During fourteen months' fieldwork in Banská Bystrica, however, I realized that this question was far more crucial than perhaps even my bemused reviewers had intended. I wanted to find out how local élites construct and deploy transnational identities in order to win membership in the so-called "European club." Because I was interested in how Slovaks make their case for being European, who I was mattered a great deal. As all ethnographers do, I consciously shaped my self-presentation in order to elicit the most useful possible responses to my interventions and inquiries. On the one hand, I was an American; on the other hand, my mother and grandfather had been born in Slovakia. On the one hand, I was a near-native son, returned "home"; on the other hand I was a Western interloper, come to pass judgment on a struggling new country. Furthermore, I was a credentialed academic researcher (albeit a very junior one) with ties to a world-renowned university. To complicate matters further, I was Jewish, and during the Holocaust various members

of my maternal family had been deported by the Slovak wartime regime; my grandparents had fled the country with my mother in 1939. Each of these identities—American, repatriated Slovak, Westerner, academic, Jew—shifted in importance throughout my research, sometimes because of, other times in spite of, my best intentions.

The ambiguity of my identities became very apparent both to others and to me during the NATO campaign in Serbia and Kosovo. Although Slovak public opinion was divided deeply over the abstract justification for the war, there was strong opposition to the intervention itself, and as a Westerner—worse, an American with ties to Britain—I was suspect. Despite all efforts to reassure my friends and colleagues, I was unable to convince anyone to consent to an interview. As a result, I did not conduct my first formal interview until nearly two months after the end of the bombing. The NATO campaign, however, did provide me many opportunities to learn about Slovakia's precarious position as a Slavic country seeking entry into the European Union. Radio and television programs, newspapers, and magazines all resounded with impassioned arguments about Slovakia's ethnic and political obligations. My own ambiguous status provoked a variety of reactions, both silent and vocal.

My Oxford University reviewers might well have asked a similar question about my blurred identity three years earlier, when I embarked upon a rather different fieldwork project in southern California, this time working out of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Under the auspices

of a bi-coastal grant project, entitled “Religion and Generational Cultures,” I set out to study the success of New Song Church, a Los Angeles-area evangelical Protestant congregation targeting the 18-35 year-old age group more commonly known as “Generation X.” This time, my reviewers might have asked, “And just how is it that a liberally-minded Jewish academic can ask conservative Christians why their church works?”

At New Song Church, I encountered a different kind of engagement with my identity. At the conclusion of my research project, the associate pastor and I were sitting in his office discussing my findings. “Do you have any questions you never got around to asking?” he inquired. “Not really,” I replied. “I’ll bet you’re wondering why we never tried to convert you,” he prompted. “Yes, actually I was,” I answered, somewhat startled by his directness. He told me that the staff members preferred to be good models rather than good persuaders and that while he hoped I would one day become a Christian, it could only happen when I was ready. Evangelism at New Song is primarily concerned with setting a Christian example through personal witness—but not so much through verbal testimony as through behavioral modeling. However, in retrospect, I am not certain I could have documented this as straightforwardly if I had been an insider, already “a Christian.”

1. Beyond reflexive ethnography

I want to propose a model of ethnographic reflexivity that resists making distinctions between the ethnographer and the subject of study. This model is

concerned less with reducing the social distance between the observer and the observed than it is with rethinking the context within which the ethnographer understands his or her encounter with the “Other.” The first step in being “reflexive” in this proposed model is acknowledging “the field” includes the ethnographer himself or herself.

This is the import of the “reflexive turn” in cultural anthropology. Both *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and *After Writing Culture* (James, Hockey, & Dawson, 1997) devote extensive consideration to the challenges of “representation” and the relationship between ethnographic texts and their subject matter. Although *Writing Culture* asks more about the structure of representations, while *After Writing Culture* asks more about the meaning of representations, both collections focus on representations as scholars produce them.

Both texts, like others in their genre, call into question long-held assumptions about the motives and consequences of ethnographic research. From *Writing Culture* onward, the myth of the impartial anthropologist mastering all he surveys finally is put to rest. Instead, ethnographers can produce knowledge that is at best “inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete” (Clifford, 1986, p. 7). No single field researcher can hope to capture an entire culture; still less can he or she claim “authority” to speak for silent (or silenced) “Others.” In *After writing culture*, Allison James, Jenny Hockey, and Andrew Dawson argue that anthropologists must “pay closer attention to the epistemological grounds of their representations and, furthermore, ...consider the practical import of that process of reflection” (James, Hockey, & Dawson, 1997, p.

3). “Whose representations are they?” ask the authors; they note the impossibility of representing “whole cultures” and the difficulties in conveying “the ways our informants succeed in representing to themselves the unfolding events that go to make up their everyday experience” (James, Hockey, & Dawson, 1997, pp. 7, 9-10). The authors also argue that the political dimensions implicit in ethnographic representation require that “we ...no longer distance ourselves from responsibility for our texts” and that “[we] consider carefully ...the political fall-out of our representational practices” (James, Hockey, & Dawson, 1997, pp. 12-13).

However, neither book asks how the process of representation is managed by the people we study, and how those representations inevitably affect the outcome of our field research. Thus, the so-called “reflexive moment” in ethnography is restricted to the person of the researcher and his or her work-product. As such, the three major arguments of “reflexive anthropologists” are self-limiting and do not achieve the full potential inherent in the notion of reflexivity.

Firstly, reflexive anthropologists observe that the so-called “field” itself exists, if at all, only because the ethnographer says it does. Each scholar defines the field in each given project, and in some cases the field only exists because the scholar sees a coherence visible perhaps only to him- or herself. However, conventional reflexivists do not consider the often extensive negotiation that takes place before and during fieldwork, negotiation over the definition and boundaries of the “field.” Fellow academics, whether colleagues or reviewers of grant proposals, may try to assert or impose their own assumptions about the field. Similarly, once in the field

(however defined), researchers must often contend with local suggestions to reshape the scope of the inquiry. For example, Lynn Davidman has observed that “a deeply held bias towards institutional religious forms” of American Jewry has dominated the academy; “unaffiliated Jews,” she claims have become “a residual category in studies of contemporary Jewish life.” Her response is to propose research that moves these “marginal Jews” from the periphery to the center (Davidman, 2000, p. 430). While I was conducting field research, I interviewed a member of the Banská Bystrica Rotary Club who suggested that there was not enough of a “community” in the club to justify studying it as such. As a result, I took a more critical approach to my assumptions that the Rotary Club was a coherent network. In both of these instances, the “field” is revealed to be a product of complex negotiations among a variety of groups, the nexus of which is the ethnographer.

Secondly, reflexive field researchers point out that all encounters between the ethnographer and his or her informants take place in and through the ethnographer’s own construct. Indeed, the terms “informant,” “consultant,” and “interviewee” are inherently relational; they have meaning only because they refer to interaction with the fieldworker. However, the nature of that interaction has a profound effect, albeit one not often acknowledged, on the outcome of the research and its presentation in textual form. In his study of the controversial International Church of Christ, Gregory Stanczak reveals himself in the text only long enough to tell us that once he “sat cowering in [his] seat as disciples called out their encouragement” during a particularly fiery sermon (Stanczak, 2000, p. 116). Given the aggressive

evangelization techniques for which the ICC has become well known, the nature of the interaction between the fieldworker and his informants deserves greater attention than it receives in Stanczak's study.

Third, reflexive ethnographers contend that, through the writing of the ethnography itself, the "field" is visible to the reader only through the mediated vision and analysis of the ethnographer-author. Moreover, to some extent, the success of the ethnography depends on the ability of the author to persuade the reader that the field is both valid and meaningful. In her study of a synagogue service for single Generation X Jews in Los Angeles, J. Liora Gubkin begins an important paragraph in a reflexive way: "As a Generation X Jew myself, I was a participant as well. Thus, I too was privileged to partake in the fine art of flirting." Yet her description trivializes the importance of the courtship encounters during and after the service by focusing almost exclusively on her own negative and positive experiences in such a flippant tone that she even mocks a congregant who attempted to make a connection. By the end of the paragraph, she is "happy to report that I even secured a date. We met while watching Israeli dancing. My mother is ecstatic" (Gubkin, 2000, p. 208). In short, this crucial element of Gubkin's analysis is trapped in its own narcissistic vision—not only was the ethnographer gazing at her own navel, she delights in suggesting that others were, too. The effect is to trivialize the entire field encounter.

Sheba George's (1998) insightful study of an Indian Orthodox church began as a congregational study but was published as a study of "the negotiation of gendered space" because of her very similar, though longer-term, involvement as an

attendee at the church. Indeed, George reports that it was her initial innocent query—why only the men went caroling at Christmastime—that set the stage for her study of gender relations at the church (George, 1998, pp. 265-266). She further describes how her involvement in organizing a coed youth caroling group made her “the object of some sanctions that gave [her] insight into the manner in which boundaries were drawn around male participation” (George, 1998, pp. 281-283). Like Gubkin, George reports on a variety of uncomfortable situations in which she found herself, encounters that highlighted her liminal status as an unmarried female researcher, but George makes effective use of those situations to establish herself as inextricably implicated in a clear field of contested gender relations as an object of sustained study. She persuades us that her position was a vantage point.

All this is very useful and good, but reflexivity need not limit itself to standpoint analysis. There is a second step that anthropologists have seldom taken, which goes beyond the insight that ethnographer’s *construct* the “field.” More fundamentally, I shall argue that the ethnographer *is* the “field”—and quite literally. That is, ethnographers do not just *represent* and *define* the “field”; they *become* it.

To reach this conclusion, we must look more closely at the representational process: not just while the ethnographer writes up her or his research, but also while she carries it out. As much as we may hate to admit it, ethnographers actively manipulate their identities in order to get what they want in the field setting. Informants, in turn, manipulate both their own and the ethnographer’s identity for their own ends. Thus, the fieldwork situation and its aftermath involve at least seven

different representational moments:

1. “I the Anthropologist” represent myself and people like me (i.e. anthropologists and ethnographers, even academic scholars as a group) to the “Others.”
2. The “Others” represent me to themselves. They decide for themselves who I really am and why I am among them.

These first two moments of representation take place not only at the beginning of fieldwork, when we first enter a community and attempt to locate ourselves within it, but also as fieldwork progresses and our role and purpose change. The sociologist William Shaffir describes his initial foray into the world of Chassidic Jewry:

A Lubavitcher asked me: “Exactly why are you so interested in Chassidim? Is it just for the university or are you yourself interested?” I instinctively recognized the advantage of including a personal motivation in my reply, which was not entirely untrue, and before I had a chance to formulate a reply the man explained: “You see, if it is just for school then I can answer your questions one way. But if I know that as a Jew you are also interested in this, then I will answer your questions differently.” ... By projecting both personal and academic interests, I was attempting to display a particular image that I suspected would be received favorably. (Shaffir, 1991, p. 78)

In my own case in Slovakia, I found if I amplified one part of my background, if I told people my mother was born in Slovakia, very few people asked other questions of me and were more willing to share of themselves. I had any number of ethnic identities I could have chosen—Moravian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, or even Egyptian. I consciously chose to give people the piece I thought would make them open up to me, or I thought would make them relate to me in a way I wanted them to do. To a certain extent, both then in Slovakia and three years earlier at New Song in Southern

California, I presented myself in ways that skirted the issue of my own religious identity. While some people knew I was Jewish, others did not, and I actively avoided the subject because I did not want my Jewishness to become a complicating factor in my research relationships. Inevitably, though, one's identity always creeps in to shape the field and its web of relationships, and I now regret, for example, that I allowed the staff at New Song (who knew I was Jewish) to steer me away from a "Jews for Jesus" family active in the congregation.

Regardless of the ethnographer's efforts, however, members of the community under study inevitably come to their own conclusions. The anthropologist Susan Harding experienced such a questioning of her motives when she began interviewing fundamentalist Baptists in Lynchburg, Virginia:

I was naïve enough to think I could be detached," she writes. "My story about what I was doing there, instead of protecting me from going native (a kind of ethnographer's verbal fetish) located me in their world: I was a lost soul on the brink of salvation. And Reverend Cantrell spoke to me accordingly. (Harding, 1999, pp. 386-387)

In both instances, as Harding puts it, the exchanges were strategies to "locate [the ethnographer-outsider] in their world." They helped the Chassidim—or the Baptists—to figure out how to understand the ethnographer's presence in their own internal terms. In my own experience, my closest friend in Banská Bystrica, a member of the Rotary Club, often introduced me to friends and colleagues by highlighting my Slovak heritage. Once I moved to Banská Bystrica on a longer-term basis, he successfully proposed my election to membership (which also proved immeasurably helpful to my fieldwork). In his case, he chose to resolve the ambiguity by making me

(more formally) a Rotarian and (less formally) a Slovak. It was his way of resolving the “category error” (see Wilcox, 2001) that my initially ambivalent status created.

3. The “Others” represent themselves within their own groups.

4. The “Others” represent themselves to me and to people like me.

In many respects, this is what reflexive anthropologists study—the way people represent themselves. To be sure, much of what we see has very little to do with our presence. Nevertheless, a great deal of it is aimed directly at us. Indeed, the members of the communities we study may recognize their performed identities as such, that is, as part of an unresolved—perhaps irresolvable—discourse about multiple meanings of those identities. In this respect, the fieldworker becomes what Neil Jarman calls a “watched watcher” (1997, p. 10), the spectator who is the object of their performance and thus a part of it. Often, they are quite consciously using all the techniques they know to stage a brilliant performance of the identity they wish to claim.

During a visit to Slovakia, I attended a reception in the Banská Bystrica Jewish community at which among other cold cuts and desserts appeared sliced ham. When I asked about this, no one seemed particularly concerned. Indeed, the members of the Jewish community did not seem particularly bothered about *seeming* Jewish at all. They say, for example, that they are well aware that I (a Euro-Atlantic Jew and again a “watched watcher”) neither expect (nor particularly want) to see pork served at Jewish community functions. Nevertheless, they serve it and eat it anyway. In fact there are probably any number of ways that the members of the Jewish community go about proving actively (and passively) that they are no different from anyone else.

They are trying to convince themselves of this; they are trying to convince non-Jewish Slovaks of this. They do not seem particularly to care about what Euro-Atlantic and Israeli Jews think about this. Again, what is my responsibility as an anthropologist? Do I accept their performance and, as in the theatre, willingly suspend any disbelief? Do I push harder and harder to find out what (other than genealogy) separates them from their non-Jewish neighbors? Again, what if the Jews think they are just like other Slovaks but the Slovaks disagree? What if the Slovaks think the Jews are just like other Slovaks but the Jews disagree? What if the Slovak Jews think they are just like other Jews but the other Jews disagree? What if Slovak Jews disagree among themselves? What is a Jew? What is a Slovak? According to whose definition?

When I asked again, some time later, about the ham at the reception, the president of the Jewish community replied briefly that of course it was “poultry ham,” that they never would have served pork products. What to make of this: a Jewish community reception, with both Jews and non-Jews present, some of whom cognizant and others unaware of the nature of Jewish dietary laws, featuring what appeared to be the most non-kosher meat possible when it was really only a simulacrum, but only the organizers of the reception knew this (or claimed this after the fact)? Who is representing what (and whom) to whom?

5. The “Others” represent me to myself.

No matter who we say we are, the people we study and live with nonetheless come up with their own impressions and interpretations. Sometimes they share them

with us, and often they do not. Susan Harding has described how during her fieldwork among fundamentalist Baptists, congregants told her outright that she was not merely an academic researcher, but that she was a “seeker” led by God to them for conversion and redemption (Harding, 1999, 2000). To a certain extent, both for William Shaffir’s Lubavitcher Chassid, and for Harding’s fundamentalist Baptist, this act of representation was a proselytic strategy, intended to change the researcher’s self-image en route to conversion. Indeed, a reader might reasonably have expected that Gregory Stanczak would have had a similar experience while studying the International Church of Christ in Los Angeles, but he does not report it in his text (Stanczak, 2000).

In my case in Slovakia, my tenuous family ties provoked a variety of reactions, and while some people asked me if I felt Slovak, others simply told me that I was. At the beginning of my field stay, I found it both necessary and advantageous to apply for a “Foreign Slovak Pass,” which would provide me with unrestricted residence and work authorizations based on my partially ethnic Slovak roots. When I finally received the pass, I showed it to some friends in a Jewish youth group. They looked at it and one said, “Why do you want this? What are you, nuts?” I said, “No, this is how I can work here.” They could not understand why somebody who already had an American passport would want or would even need any kind of documentation in Slovakia. Even more baffling to them was why an American Jew whose mother had fled Slovakia in 1939 would want any kind of formal affiliation with that country, given its active participation in the Holocaust. These twentysomething Slovak Jews,

many of whom openly admit that they would rather live somewhere else, were astonished to see an American pleased to establish ties with Slovakia: “You know, we’re trying to get out—why are you trying to get in?”

6. “I the Anthropologist” represent the “Other” to fellow anthropologists, as well as to the public.

7. “I the Anthropologist” represent the “Other” to them.

The first of these two moments is the one to which Marcus, Fischer, and other reflexive anthropologists devote the most attention, because it is the essence of anthropological writing: an ethnography is nothing if not the representation of the “Other.” The second moment of representation occurs when our written work becomes accessible to our informants and they react to their portrayal. The apocryphal story often is repeated about the contemporary anthropologist who traveled to study the Tikopia people in the south Pacific. When he asked about the meaning of a particular custom, his informant asked him to wait a moment so that he could look up the answer in his copy of Sir Raymond Firth’s anthropological classic, *We the Tikopia*. This problem is particularly acute for scholars of religion encountering groups who believe they have been “burned” already and do not want to repeat the experience. Shortly before I began my project at New Song, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a story about the church and its outreach to Generation Xers. Ironically, it had been this story that first had interested me in the church. However, the staff members at New Song were very disappointed by the article. They felt that they had been misrepresented, and they were concerned that they should not be

defined by the portrayal in the *Times*. My access to the church was conditioned on my taking a more detailed and certainly more academic approach to my study of the church. At the end of the project, they read my research report and compared it to other published accounts of the congregation, and they expressed their “approval” of my work.

8. Finally: “I the Anthropologist” represent the “the Ethnographer” not only to the public, but also to my fellow anthropologists.

Although often the least overt of the representational moments outlined here, it is perhaps the most important to the development of the discipline of ethnography. Every new ethnography implicitly presents a prescriptive model for how ethnography ought—or ought not—to be “done.” Texts such as *Writing Culture*, *After Writing Culture*, *Women Writing Culture*, and even this volume are contributions to a larger ongoing discussion about what it has meant, what it means, and what it should mean to be an ethnographer in the contemporary world. In *Gatherings in Diaspora*, Judith G. Wittner concludes her afterword—and the book itself—with an extended analysis of the impact of the relationships in the field on the published ethnographies. “All of these stories,” she writes, “are necessarily partial stories. They tell readers about religious worlds as they are illuminated through the lived relationships between scholars and members of communities” (Wittner, 1998, p. 382). This is both a reminder and an appeal, recalling the first moment of ethnographic representation at the outset of fieldwork, that researchers consciously locate themselves and their projects in the nexus of the academy, the field, and the ethnographer.

2. Implicated (in) representation

Taken separately, each of the representations outlined here has been the subject of extensive reflection among anthropologists. These moments of representation occur and re-occur throughout the research, writing, and publication process. The representations may overlap and conflict. Some representations may be purposeful, others happenstance or apparently unintended. Sometimes there are self-conscious expressions of idealized representations. For example, I have translated into English promotional materials for a Banská Bystrica tradeshow firm whose owner/director is a close friend. In doing so I have had to discuss with him the content of his materials and why he wishes to present them the way he does. Furthermore, he and others with whom I worked had—in my presence—to articulate their idealized and actual identities in a communicable way. At the same time, however, I had to ask myself how much of what I saw and heard was performed with an eye to influencing my findings about the presence or absence of European identity. Similarly, at New Song, I had to ask myself how much of what was done or said in my presence had to do with my being a non-Christian, or an academic.

What are the implications of studying and writing about a group that seems already to know how it wishes to be represented? If I am a “watched watcher,” part of the representational process, then in certain ways I am part of the stage on which the phenomena I wish to study will play out. Moreover, insofar as I take part in the events that I study, then my own activities ought to come under the anthropological gaze. I am not only the writer, director, and producer of my ethnography—I am also an actor

in it. Finally, if I am active in separate, but inter-related networks in a larger setting, then my behavior in one arena will inevitably affect my identity in the others. In light of the increasing difficulty of determining when the ethnographer is “in the field” and when off site, one can easily argue that the field is wherever the fieldworker happens to be, and from there it is a short step to the conclusion that the field *is also* the anthropologist himself. The field simply cannot exist without the relationship between the ethnographer and the object of study.

My claims need not lead to radical conclusions about ethnographic fiction or even solipsism. In his groundbreaking article on ethnographic holism, Robert Thornton argues that the purpose of ethnography is in large part “to convince the reader of the existence of an initially unperceived coherence” (Thornton, 1988, p. 292). Elsewhere, he claims that “apparent boundaries...such as those that define nations, ethnic groups, age-grades, or classes, are seen to be relative in time, the observer, or to each other, and thus not ‘really’ there at all” (Thornton, 1988, p. 299). This previously “unperceived coherence,” these “apparent boundaries” come into existence through the closure of the ethnographic text. Other discussions have focused on the production of the text itself, but that is not my objective here. I do not seek to reduce the field to fiction, but rather to call attention to the way that we as anthropologists attempt to create knowledge about what is actually “out there.” The transformation begins not when we write the text, but earlier, when we define the field. In that moment, we bind ourselves to a particular slice of reality in a way that should not, indeed cannot, be undone—nor ignored.

NINE. INCONCLUSION: MISRECOGNITION, TRANSGRESSION, AND THE BURDEN OF UNFALSIFIABILITY

Connections are different from equivalences, and connections are not only matters of cause and effect. They involve shared culture and common histories. They involve the closeness to specific settings and versions of being-in-the-world that Heidegger described as “dwelling.” This may involve a recognition of others as belonging in some of the same settings even without a sense of being the same as them or feeling fond of them. At a global scale, thus, we might helpfully think of a cosmopolitanism of connections, rather than one only of universal categorical equivalences. And at a local level, we may create the conditions of peaceful coexistence better through recognition of fellow-belonging despite difference than through a search for universalistic common denominators. (Calhoun, 2012, p. 358)

Calhoun’s evocative description of the power of connections in the study of religion captures well the focus of this dissertation and the conceptual schema in which, it turns out, my case studies have been rooted. Looking at connections as they are sited in discourses of recognition, differentiation, intimacy, and pillarization offers new insights into the negotiation of individual and collective religious life. If, as Smith (2012) claims, we humans are liturgical animals, then, in the wake of secularization, perhaps there is no story of decline or erosion; instead, we simply have reconfigured our liturgies to respond to contemporary conditions. And connections are the dynamic middle ground where they play out.

1. The power to take the long view

Although I write these words in a place far from the sites of my field research—geographically and theoretically—in a way I have returned to where I began, two decades ago, to travel this intellectual path. As I observed in the introduction, the arguments presented here represent a kind of archeology of theory, an attempt to dig out the conceptual map that undergirds each of the case studies presented here.

The scaffolding dates back at least twenty years. Writing an undergraduate thesis for Randall Balmer, I attempted to describe an American national religious consciousness that depends on pluralism—not simply Christian denominational pluralism, nor even the range of Judeo-Christian beliefs, but, as I put it, rather a multiplicity of traditions, interacting with each other in an attempt to come up with some religious meaning for ‘America.’” My post-sophomoric insight that the dialogical self thrives in a dialogical society led to a largely unsuccessful attempt to outline an approach to the study of American civic religious history that stressed the contested nature of history itself.

Some four years later, I found myself making a similar, if slightly more focused argument; writing in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, I posited:

civil society has something to do with individualism and equality, the ritual practices that create and structure civil society do so by establishing specific kinds of personhood and the social bonds that link persons. ...First, civil society is made visible to anthropologists through rituals that simultaneously constitute civil society and create and re-create social persons. Secondly, because ritual and personhood occur in a variety of contexts, the idea of civil society ought not to be restricted to the broadest sphere between the individual

and the nation-state; rather, they may be observed mediating between the personal and the institutional in many different settings. Thirdly, through ritual practices and the actions of creating and re-creating social persons, civil society is inextricably involved with power relations and negotiations over status. ... “[Individual and institution] negotiate constantly over the power to enforce conformity and order and the capacity to resist that power and assert individuality ... communicate to their audiences the values to which the audience itself ought to aspire (Landres, 1997a, pp. 164, 173)

I reproduce this at length to make two points, one related to process and the other to the theory itself.⁴⁵ First, applying the extended case method, as described earlier in the Introduction, not only offers the opportunity to reconsider theory in light of empirically grounded research, but also forces the researcher to reflect, over time, on the limits and possibilities of theory in light of the research undertaken. It is perhaps no coincidence that some of the sharpest calls for reconsidering the definition of what it is that scholars of religion study have come from those with long and diverse experience of field-based research (e.g., Juergensmeyer, 2011; Roof, 1999; Taves 2010; Tweed, 2010). To that end, in this dissertation—textured by research experiences during three different decades and modulated, if not muted, by the diversity of the religious in a world after secularization—I join that cause with my own cautionary tale.

This leads to the second point—power: the power of the researcher to see and communicate his or her vision, alongside witnessed power struggles that inhere in identity-definition in every setting, from the institutional to the interpersonal. When

⁴⁵ I am struck as well by the congruence of these observations (and my conceptual project as a whole) with James K. A. Smith’s proposal for a post-secular sociology of religion based on the argument that humans are liturgical animals and that religion is visible via formative liturgies (Smith, 2012).

we study connections at the intersection of individuals and institutions, we as scholars must be close enough to the action to be touched by it, and to touch it, whether we choose to do so or not. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher's representation of reality continually is contested, whether substantively or by the simultaneous presence of complementary representations. Thus, the difficulty: how to summarize the arguments presented here without overstating the case or undermining it.

2. Misrecognition, transgression, and unfalsifiability

If, as I have claimed, religion is empirically visible to the scholar solely through language and behavior by agents acting within cohesive segmentary social networks characterized by discourse and communicative action in service of whatever is situationally defined as religious, then there are three major limitations with which I must contend, or at least acknowledge: misrecognition, transgression, and unfalsifiability. In this brief “inconclusion,” I want to use each of these as a starting point for considerations of what my findings mean, and where future research could go.

The first is misrecognition. If a “religion” exists only insofar as people recognize one another as co-adherents (or, in finer grain, as in agreement on specific forms of apprehension, whether doctrinal or experiential), then what happens when the recognition is not mutual? Or when the researcher sees something that his or her informants do not? And what are the researcher's ethical obligations with respect to

naming what is, or is not, recognized? During my research at New Song, despite the call to “major in the majors and minor in the minors,” nevertheless, serious disagreements about gender roles—no matter that they never were aired publicly — arguably challenged the community’s creedal coherence. My case study alludes to these but does not highlight them; should it have?

The second limitation to the approach presented in this dissertation is transgression. In a number of the case studies presented here, certain beliefs and behaviors are defined as explicitly transgressive, even ultimately incompatible with membership in the given group. At the same time, however, explicit communicative strategies are deployed to make “true”—that is, irreparable—transgression practically impossible. However fascinating the process of negotiation may be to the researcher, at one point does the institution’s attempt to hold itself together become organizationally self-defeating? Drawing on centuries of church discourse, True Love Waits successfully replaced the ideal of virginity with that of chastity, and implicitly narrowed the definition of sex to include only intercourse, thereby enabling sexually active teens to participate in the campaign. At what point, however, does the eroticism of the campaign undermine its integrity, and whose call is that to make?

Finally, although the problem of unfalsifiability by no means is unique to the situations presented here, and in fact is in some respect a quality of all participant-observer research, nevertheless, it remains that with respect to these cases—and the claims their stakeholders make—there is no right or wrong: only goodness of fit. For example, I believe that my recasting of the *mizuko kuyo* ritual by looking at the

relationship of the ritual actors to ritual performance itself is more convincing and more likely to be true; but I cannot prove it any more than I can “prove” the ethnoreligious ambivalence of Slovak Jews. In addition, the shift from belief as propositional to “belief as cultural performance” (to cite the title of a 2013 special issue of the *Journal of contemporary religion*), consistent with Smilde’s proposal for “embodied realism” (2013, pp. 58-62), raises the question of whether, and if so, how, a performance can ever be “wrong.”

I raise these points not only as caveats to my arguments, but also as indicators of possible directions for theoretical inquiry and empirical research. The possibility of misrecognition offers an alternative window on the nature of conflict within religious traditions, particularly disputes over socially influenced doctrinal change, where no party wishes to give up its claim to authenticity (cf. Roof & Landres, 1997, which documents the alternative outcomes). If misrecognition leads to an examination of individual identity *in extremis*, then transgression can do the same for institutional identity. What are the limits of an organization’s capacity to contain diverse, even divergent, definitions of its purpose and role? If the organizing principle for collective religious action is now an interpersonal, relational dynamic rather than the institutional framework, then how far can those dynamics be stretched before they break? Finally, unfalsifiability, ultimately, yields a call for humility, a recognition that the study of religion bridges the social sciences and the humanities and is as dependent on the sensitivity of the scholar-observer as it is on the clarity of the research situation. It calls for further research that chronicles the narratives through

which people make religion—whether they bestow meaning (Roof, 1999) or deem experiences and things special (Taves, 2009, 2010)—*together*, on the middle ground of congregations and other institutions. That humility extends to the fields under study and the people implicated within them: “we cannot simply universalize and ontologize anyone’s so-called experiences as if they were real things in the world...ultimately, this all means making their own practices their object of study,” cautions McCutcheon (2012, p. 90). Put another way, we must attend to “issues of how people make themselves up even as they are made up by ideas, concepts, and words that have nothing essentially to do with them” (Modern, 2012, p. 455). Congregations and other middle-ground institutions in many respect are the places people go to work out for themselves the very implications of that observation (see Schonfield, 2006 for a study of Jewish liturgy as an exercise in addressing the anxiety that arises from not knowing whether God cares—or even knows—about the people at prayer.)

This, too, shall pass...?

One possible corrective to these limitations—indeed a way to test whether a given research project suffers from them—is the passage of time. Indeed, the field itself is defined temporally as well as in other ways, and therefore, it should be expected that its contours would be defined, negotiated, and represented in terms of that dimension as well. Moreover, as Steffen Dalsgaard points out, the finite time spent in the field by the researcher necessarily limits not only the researcher’s depth

of understanding but also her or his capacity to anticipate, over the longer term, the ultimate import of the fieldwork: “there is not an experience of structure over a long time (or necessarily a sense of certainty of what post-fieldwork goal one is aiming at, or in what direction one is moving)” (Dalsgaard, 2013, pp. 218-219) Although Dalsgaard acknowledges that field material may stay relevant if “after spatially leaving the field, the ethnographer may (serendipitously) discover new themes in his or her material elicited by contemporary events either in the field or in one’s home society,” his discussion of the temporality of the field presumes a continuous relationship over time with a particular field site; for example, considers whether blogs could serve as “continuous forms of (semi-bounded) analysis potentially extending coevalness from fieldwork to ethnographic representation” (Dalsgaard, 2013, p. 221). However, he does not consider the possibility of discontinuity between the field experience and later analysis, nor the possibility that the passage of time actually disconfirm initial fieldwork-based findings. A case in point: my research on public murals in Los Angeles (Landres, 1995, Landres, 1997b, Landres 2002b), in which I supported my argument that “sacred space is alive and well in the urban environment, and that it may be found in the aesthetic meaning-making activity of community-based public mural art” (Landres, 2002b, p. 105) by reference to three specific murals. Eighteen years later, however, two of the three murals have been erased completely and the third has suffered both partial erasure and graffiti vandalism. Whether or not public art can constitute sacred space, it seems clear that it did not do so in the cases I presented, at least not for very long.

3. Grounding religion, interstitially

As noted here and above, the case studies in this dissertation offer a contribution to the Ammerman's call for "attention to the actions of religious organizations," whether as cultural creators and cultivators of effective religious resources or as contributors to their own weakness, especially as unintentionally "secularizing agents" (2007, pp. 233-234; for an excellent example of this, see De Groot, Kregting, & Borgman, 2005). This attention deprivileges the institution as such and invites finer-grained study of the dynamics at play within the networks that collectively recognize one another as related in some way to a given institution. For example, in two of the case studies, I defined the field as specific rituals rather than entire organizations (*mizuko kuyo*, Friday night Shabbat services); one focused on a transinstitutional campaign (True Love Waits); and one explicitly considered the unbundling and rebundling of congregational and communal functions (Jewish emergent). The existence of formal institutions was largely irrelevant to the identity formation of Slovak Jews in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Only the New Song case study took the "church," as such, for granted, though even there no permanent building or firm geographic boundary defined the field.

Attending to religion in organizational context also enables consideration of the extent to which religious identities are enacted in institutional settings other than congregations; for example, my own recent work documents the extent to which individuals pursue and express Jewish identities through the creation of, participation in, and charitable giving to non-profit organizations that pursue secular objectives

through a Jewish lens and, thus, challenges any notion that organized religious activity takes place in congregational or parachurch settings (Landres & Avedon, 2009; Landres & Avedon, 2011; Gerstein, Cohen, & Landres, 2013).

These case studies also imply a way to take up Turner's call "to attend more closely to the disruption of the religious habitus and the emotional life that sustains religion rather than take notice of any alleged crisis of belief" (2012, p. 136).

However, whereas Turner claims that social secularization necessarily entails "the evaporation of transcendence" (2012, p. 142), the case studies presented here suggest that his elision of immanence and accessibility may be unwarranted: this is more about making a previously *inaccessible* transcendent *accessible* to the (immanent) worshipper rather than about entirely merging the former into the latter. Moreover, although Turner argues that "the real effect of globalization has been the growth of heterodox, commercial, hybrid, syncretistic religions over orthodox, authoritative, and institutional versions of the spiritual life" (Turner, 2012, p. 154), that claim seems to be rooted in a view of pre-secular religion as somehow inherently "orthodox, authoritative, and institutional"; if anything, the case studies, especially the two literature-based ones, offer a means of reconsidering the processes by which institutional actors *always* have both negotiated with and leveraged heterodoxy, commercialism, hybridity, and syncretism.

4. Bringing anthropology back in

All of that said, it is somewhat surprising—at least to me—that there has not been a stronger effort to bridge the subfields of sociology of religion and anthropology of religion, especially with respect to the study of social networks. Anthropology should be brought back into religious studies in ways that Cannell (2005, 2006, 2010) and others have begun to do with great effect and to begin to address the tensions between the disciplines that have prevented greater integration. Although what Martin Mills calls an “implicit foundational ontology of ‘true religion’” (Mills, 2012, p. 193) echoes critiques leveled by Fitzgerald (2000), McCutcheon (2003), and others, one need not replace the search for the essential *sui generis* elements of religion with a flight from that search. As Ebaugh (Meyer, Barker, Ebaugh, & Juergensmeyer, 2011) and Campbell (2012) argues, and as I believe this dissertation does as well, an exploration of social network theory could prove extremely fruitful in this regard.⁴⁶ Moreover, it could not only invigorate the

⁴⁶ Jumping-off points could include the counterpoint of Vaisey and Lizardo (2010), who find that cultural worldviews inform network selection and participation, with Smilde (2007, 2012), who notes that network participation can drive belief and behavior. Alternatively research could focus on specific sites and social situations, such as cities, which offer the opportunity to “move away from indicators such as religious affiliation and religious belief and instead draw attention to the institutional viability of religious organizations in ...urban spheres” or enable the analysis of “hidden religious topographies that impart religious signification to networks of sites that are only recognizable by insiders” (Burchardt & Becci, 2013, pp. 7, 12). In making her case for anthropologists to “contribute to the expansion of the repertoire of ethnographic studies of actual, lived situations (in the West and outside it) in which local peoples enact their understandings of, interest in, or perhaps total indifference to the secular and the religious,” Fenella Cannell specifically calls for “welcome new perspectives on secularism and Judaism, Orthodox Christianity, and other faiths and practices not prominent in the current literature” (Cannell, 2010, p. 97).

theoretical and methodological conversations in both sociology and anthropology (see Comaroff, 2010) but also provide needed perspective as network research pursues the integration of connections, structures, and meaning (cf. Fuhse & Mützel, 2011). Finally, ethnographically informed social network analyses of religious situations could begin to address some of the structural dilemmas Teemu Taira identifies with respect to incorporating the discursive study of religion into the teaching program of departments of religious studies (Taira, 2013, pp. 41-42). Indeed, it could be immensely helpful to see a volume along these lines for undergraduate and graduate student use, incorporating work by Besecke, Cadge, Ebaugh, Taira, Vásquez, and many others. An anthropological lens also could simultaneously restore both a sense of holism and humility: holism in the sense that applying the extended case study method and global ethnography to the study of organizations and networks calls for a sense of breadth and scale at the same time, as David Gellner notes, that there are limits to the number of people with whom one meaningfully interacts and so trade-offs must be made:

Globalisation brings the limits of holism into stark relief: even the most heroic fieldworker obviously cannot study the whole globe in a face-to-face way. Multi-sited fieldwork does not make this problem go away. Holism ...is not a realistic practice for any but the smallest social units; it is, rather, a regulative ideal, a metaphor for methodological and disciplinary inclusiveness. It therefore needs to be recognised as an ideal, rather than a practice, and the role of the fieldworker's choices—arbitrary, from one point of view, but informed—in constructing the field must be consciously and explicitly recognised. (Gellner, 2012, p. 6)

Holism, then, in the aspiration toward the ideal, and humility in the recognition of the impossibility of achieving it (*pace* Spickard, Landres, & McGuire, 2002), goes a long way toward restoring poesis and playfulness (*pace* Bivins, 2012; Modern, 2012).

I return, in the end, to the mirror. For all their differences, when I hold up the case studies to the conceptual mirror I see, however rough the outline, the same set of ideas: terms of connection. Whether they are fixed but porous or flexible but impermeable, the terms are always up for negotiation, always already contested. The dialogue, then, is not with myself, nor with the world, but is inherent to “religion” itself.

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