Organized Religion in a Voluntaristic Society

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Speaking about voluntarism in American religion is not exactly a novel activity these days. Especially since Warner's (1993) pioneering article, it has become common to point to the voluntaristic character of religion in the US as a key to understanding its principles of organization. Before these most recent debates, many observers had seen that matter differently, pointing to voluntarism as the key to understanding religion's current woes. Organized religion suffers, these commentators lament, because too many people are doing too much choosing, moving in and out of religious affiliation and from one group to another, seemingly willy nilly (e.g., Marler and Roozen 1993). Warner and others, however, argued that it is precisely this ability to choose that has kept religious organizations so remarkably healthy in this country, especially as compared to similar bodies in Europe.[1] It has made them responsive to the demands of consumers, created space for innovation, and weeded out the organizational deadwood.

While I tend to agree more heartily with the latter interpretation, I am not satisfied that rational choice economic models are the best and only way to understand the effects of voluntarism on the organizational life of religion. What I want to try to do in this paper is to suggest some alternative ways to understand the realities and effects of voluntarism. I want to claim from rational choice theory the importance of the agency of the religious actor. But I want to go beyond those models in seeking a more textured interpretation of human agency, one that owes more to a symbolic interactionist perspective, placing the actor in the social and organizational contexts in which religious action takes place. In addition, I want to place that action squarely in the radically multi-textured reality in which late twentieth-century people live.

What I hope this exercise will help us to do is to re-think our ways of understanding the nature of religious organization and of the relationship of individuals to it. By focussing on the active agency of religious persons and on the interactive contexts in which that action takes place, I hope to begin to suggest some of the ways in which some of our static concepts of religious life can no longer serve us well. Rather than either/or categories like sect/church, sacred/secular, member/non-member, believer/skeptic, accommodation/ resistance, or tradition/modernity, we may begin to imagine ways of describing the much more complicated reality we encounter in a world where actors are constantly choosing their ways of being religious.

This paper will address the question of active voluntary forms of religious activity on three increasingly macro levels: the level of individual religiousness; the level of religious organizations; and the level of the society in which that action takes place.

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1. Finke and Stark (1988) began the debate, followed by Land, Deane, and Blau (1991). The arguments are probably most clearly articulated in Iannaccone (1991), with the clarification offered by Chaves and Cann (1992).

INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOUS ACTION

First, who are the religious actors? It seems to me that sociologists interested in neat categories for the individuals we analyze have conspired with theologians and preachers equally interested, for different reasons, in being able to draw clear lines between those who are in and those who are out. We want to talk about "the difference religion makes," and so we began by dividing the world between those who are and those who aren't. Once our statistical tools allowed us to do more than construct tables and do chi square analyses, we turned our either-or question into a "how much?" question. We asked about degrees of religious salience, and we measured orthodoxy. We made statements that assumed that religion was a commodity or a condition one could have more or less of, a bit like a fever. Indeed, an implicit disease model often informed our studies -- just how sick is this person?

While all of that may be very interesting, I want to ask not whether or how much, but how. I want to know which religious behaviors are being enacted, in relation to which other actors (religious and otherwise), in which organizational and cultural contexts. The implication of a voluntaristic religious world is that no single organizational or belief context can explain any person's actions. Whatever internal gyroscopes are guiding individual behavior, they are surely calibrated anew in each of the social settings that call forth religious behavior.

I have been helped enormously in confronting the complexity of individual religious loyalties by the work of Nancy Eiesland (forthcoming and 1997). In her book, A *particular place,* she describes the different religious worlds of two couples, the Englands and the Penners. The Englands are a somewhat "traditional" small town couple -- traditional in that much of their economic, social, civic, political, leisure, family, and religious lives is encompassed by the small town in which they have lived all their lives. They belong to the local United Methodist Church, serve it in various capacities, and see it as meeting their religious needs. They are sure enough of their Methodist identity that they patiently outlasted the disruption of their church's routine by an influx of charismatic newcomers. Their religious practice takes place in the context of a relatively coherent set of fellow actors, in a discreet organizational arena, with a taken-for-granted repertoire of behaviors.

This stands in contrast to the Penners, a younger, more mobile family, new to the Englands' small town. Not only do they not have long-standing tenure with persons and institutions in the town, they are unlikely to develop them, at least not in the same way the Englands have. Their economic life takes them all over the metropolitan area of which this small town is now becoming a suburb; and their family, including those dead and buried, is scattered all over the country. They are not even likely to live in this town very long. They, too, belong to the Methodist Church, but that is neither their life-long affiliation nor their only current entanglement. In addition to their Methodist membership, Mrs. Penner participates in the "Grief Relief" support group at the local Baptist church and takes their pre-schooler to day care at still another church. The religious action of the Penners draws on a more diverse set of previous experiences, takes place in the presence of multiple sets of other religious actors in more than one organizational context m and it is more consciously improvised because of all this.

In neither case have we added to the picture the presence of various mediated religious influences -- books, magazines, television, the intemet. All of those social sources also provide models of behavior, pieces of rhetoric, bits of belief, from which individuals construct the routines they enact. Roof (1993, 1996) calls this voluntaristic construction of religious identity "pastiche" religion, but even that may still be too static. It implies that we construct our work of

art and then stand back and admire it. To understand any behavior (religious or otherwise), I'm arguing, requires that we understand the dynamic interactions in which it is lodged. It requires that we know the aircraft's current altitude and location, but also that we know its speed and direction, and the direction of the prevailing winds. The question, then, is not whether the person is religious or how religious they are. The question is rather how religious rhetorics and practices are enacted and how they are situated in various organizational contexts.

This more complex idea of individual religiosity also implies a rethinking of our notion of religious commitment. That notion has largely been measured in terms of beliefs and behaviors prescribed by identifiable religious institutions and traditions. People who believe the right things and are loyal to a given organization are seen as committed. The work of Rosabeth Kanter (1972) has been influential in conceptualizing commitment as a multi-dimensional devotion of time, energy, emotional investment, and moral energy into a single more-or-less total institution. Given her theory, individual commitment and institutional needs were inextricable. The more the institution's demands and the person's needs coincided, the higher the likelihood of individual commitment and therefore of institutional success. A similar claim is made by Iannaccone (1994) in his article on the strength of sectarian religious organizations. Religious organizations gain in strength, he claims, by the relative isolation and high levels of investment of their members, thus making the alternative attachments and rewards of the sect more valuable. However, such a high-demand/high-commitment synergy is not the only model for organizational health or for individual religiosity. To be healthy, congregations need only require sufficient supportive behavior from enough people to sustain themselves. It is perfectly possible to have a thriving low-commitment religious organization (Ammerman, forthcoming).

While there are clearly religious organizations and attachments for which the "total institution" model of commitment is useful, the vast majority of persons live with a good deal less than such total involvement. No single institution absorbs our religious energies either over a lifetime or at any given moment. Are we therefore religiously uncommitted? My answer is a clear "no." I am arguing that any involvement in religious practice counts as religious commitment. The complexity of our lives is such that we need to discard traditionalist notions of commitment, developing new models that begin with whatever bonds of practice and affiliation - however plural and temporary - actually exist.

Conservative Judaism offers us an instructive example for the situation most people face. Here I draw on research by a team of scholars working under the auspices of the Ratner Center of Jewish Theological Seminary. They note that Conservative Judaism joins Orthodoxy in declaring that there are no unimportant laws, but departs from Orthodoxy in allowing for, indeed encouraging, a different mode of commitment to the Law (Prell 1997). Observance is not an either/or matter, but a journey of faithfulness, something one grows and strives toward. Samuel Hellman (1997: 9) quotes one very wise rabbi as advising, "There are 613 commandments; find one and begin." Notice that the advice is not to pick whichever ones one chooses to obey, but rather to enter the journey and keep going. The obligation is still total, but the expectations recognize the complex negotiations that make up our everyday lives and the way lives change over time. The expectation, then, is not that one will have arrived, but that one will be on the journey.

Interestingly, my colleague Adair Lummis and I have found a very similar phenomenon in a group of Episcopal parishes we are studying. Each has been identified by its peers as especially "spiritually vital." They are places where people take religious practices seriously, where spiritual realities intrude in all sorts of ways. But they are certainly not total institutions or

sectarian in any sense of that word. There is tremendous room for individual variation in practice and style and an expectation that people's lives are full of institutional entanglements beyond the parish. Yet there is also an expectation that one's spiritual life should be a growing commitment. They express it in many different Ways, but they expect their members to be seeking God, to be actively working at religious fidelity and growth.[2] Perhaps they could say, "There are 613 prayers in the Prayer Book. Find one and begin."

Such a model can be a useful analytic tool, as well as a smart pastoral strategy. Rather than assuming that lifelong and total commitments are the only real ones, it asks simply how and under what circumstances persons enact religious behavior and how that behavior supports the goals of religious organizations and tunes individual sensibilities in religious directions. It recognizes that strong organizations will indeed encourage and provide for situations in which religious co-actors and religious settings make such institution-supporting behavior more plausible and do-able. It's easier to keep kosher, for instance, when there are kosher groceries and restaurants around. It's easier to feel at home in a synagogue or celebrating Jewish holidays at home when there have been Hebrew schools and youth camps and active bar and bat mitzvah programs that have taught the skills of ritual observance (Kosmin 1997). Berger (1969) was right about plausibility structures. It isn't so much that they insulate us from doubt. More importantly, they make religious action and rhetoric more possible and more likely, in spite of and in the midst of other social and institutional entanglements.

Of what does individual religious identity consists, then? I am suggesting that we focus our analytical energies on socially-identifiable sets of practices and the social contexts of those practices. Here, of course, I draw on Bourdieu.[3] Organization, at this level, is not a matter of fitting together a coherent internal belief system or of matching one's desire to a single institution. Organization is in the patterned sequence of action and in relationships evoked in that action (Swidler 1986). Organization has no neat boundaries in an actively voluntaristic system. We should, for example, *expect* logical contradictions among the individual's various beliefs and practices. We human beings are much more capable of living with seeming incongruity than most sociologists and theologians are ever willing to admit. If we focus on how people *make a life,* rather than on how they make *sense,* we may find the practical coherence that transcends the apparent ideological incoherence. Religious practices - both actions and rhetorics - are organized, but we will not discover that organization without paying attention to what people are doing, where, and with whom.

RELIGIOUS COLLECTIVITIES

What I have said about the organization of individual religious identities has, of course, enormous implications for the study of religious collectivities. Multiple layers of religious identity imply fluidity in religious organizational boundaries. Yet our conceptual models implicitly assume the sorts of neat membership boundaries that are. more characteristic of traditional societies than of voluntaristic, mobile ones. "Church," for instance, implies a relationship between a single religious organization and the people in a given territory, something which has never been the case in the US, even if so-called mainline Protestants did once assume that they, collectively, were the rightful heirs of that tradition. "Sect," similarly, implies a tightly-bounded organization with a focussed antagonism toward "the" society of which it is a part. Even "denomination" implies an identifiable theological tradition lodged in an equally identifiable set of institutions. All these concepts assumed that persons had an essentially linear trajectory through - not between or among m them. They do not easily take account of membership that varies over both time and space or of the sort of "hybrid" membership we have already described.

Again, an example from the study of conservative Judaism. As the movement has increasingly emphasized the possibility for a journey of commitment - rather than an either/or orthodoxy - it has also begun to erode old notions of who its members are. Most especially, women have joined men as real insiders in both everyday and synagogue ritual observance. Bat mitzvahs are now as numerous as bar mitzvahs. But it is not just women who are now full participants; de facto membership now includes many persons whose mother is not Jewish and others who marry outside the faith. These "mixed" persons would not be included in an either/or world. Their practice would not "count." But they do count in a world more focussed on practice than on boundaries. While official pronouncements have not changed, everyday practices are redefining the meaning of membership.

A religious organization is, then, an entity with a name and a constitution and a building on the corner. But it is also a shifting collection of persons, engaged in a complex set of actions and rhetorics, actions that are supported by and indeed define the collectivity they inhabit. If persons are defined by an ever-changing and multifaceted set of interactions, they bring that multi-dimensionality to the organizations they inhabit, as well. The culture of a given organization is constantly reshaped by the changing array of persons in it, each bringing a complicated history of practices into the mix. In addition, the organization's "structure" must be seen to include both its own programs and governance and its network of connections. It is a space in which certain actions are made possible, a space with connections to other spaces inhabited by related persons and actions. Religious organizations are as much a more-or-less portable collection of skills and resources as a location on a theological map.[4]

Organized Religious Practice: An Excursus on the Congregation

Just what sort of skills, resources - practices m ought we to focus on in a study of religious organization that is suited to the mobile and voluntaristic society in which we live? Since the form of religious organization I know best is the congregation, let me turn there, fully acknowledging that there are many other forms of local religious collectivity.[5] Indeed, everything I have been suggesting would indicate that we should be just as concerned with any recognized location in which actors undertake tasks they deem religious. Nevertheless, one of the most common of such places is the congregation.

For a way of thinking about how congregations organize religious practice, I turn to a framework used by Stephen Warner (1994). He has described congregations in Parsonsian functionalist terms as "collectivity-oriented, functionally diffuse, affective, and particularistic" gatherings (p. 63). To accomplish those functions, they engage in worship, religious education, mission, stewardship, and fellowship, he says. If we were to translate all of that from "function" to "practice," what would we look for?

To start with fellowship, that functionally diffuse and affective aspect of congregational life, we would look for all the ways in which practices of trust and bonding take place. How does a congregation create a space in which strangers can become at least trusting acquaintances, if not bosom friends? What practices invite dropping the masks of strangerhood? If congregations are places where affectivity thrives and where functional role boundaries are relatively less

distinct, those things are not accidental. They are the product of the practices that are

4 Milorisky (1987) makes this point about the voluntary organization sector.

5 Robert Wuthnow (1994b: 43-45) argues that a congregation has a sense of corporate identity that endures over time and is often recognized in law. The very fact that finding a definition is sometimes difficult is evidence of the proliferation of religious gatherings that sometimes approximate the congregational form.

encouraged and made possible within a certain organizational space. What, then, are the religious practices of gathering that form people into recognizable, on-going collectivities? We cannot count on stability and tradition to provide the basic building blocks of social life. Analyzing the distinctive (and not so distinctive) religious practices of relationship-building is essential to a sociology of religion. We need an analysis that takes seriously the kinds of rootedness faith communities do create in the midst of mobility and choice.

What about mission and stewardship, practices oriented toward the congregational collectivity and its neighbors? Here we might look for activities that involve encounters between persons with resources and others who need those resources, as well as looking at the practices of data-gathering and decision-making that direct those encounters. We ought to look for how groups of persons notice situations that need their attention and how they make decisions about what sort of attention they need and how many of their resources will be used in the effort. If congregations are places where altruistic behavior is expected, we would do well to study the rhetorics that surround it and the nature of the practice itself. What are the practices of giving and community involvement that are facilitated and modeled in a congregation?

Robert Wuthnow has suggested that the neediness of our world could easily overwhelm anyone who really took it seriously. Getting "involved" becomes so bewilderingly impossible that we are easily tempted to do nothing at all. By organizing our charitable activity, congregations and other helping agencies overcome that difficulty (Wuthnow 1994a: 242, 1991: 194-99). They create "helping roles" that facilitate - and limit - our activity. Wuthnow calls it "bounded love." We know what to do, when, where, and with whom. Wuthnow's research on charitable behavior is an excellent example of the gains to be made by turning our attention away from "faith" and "belief" as key measures of the religious impulse. He found that membership and activity in a congregation were far better predictors of charitable involvement than was strength of faith alone. Religious organizations, then, are spaces in which charitable activity is talked about, modeled, structured, and practiced.

Finally, how might we study worship and religious education, activities surely at the heart of what any student of organized religion would want to investigate. In ritual action and in efforts to teach their adherents about the faith, religious organizations declare their identity and seek to ensure their continuity. Our attention as sociologists rightly turns, then, to both the structure and the content of their actions.

Worship and religious education are also, however, the moments when participants claim that they are not alone in their activity. Their very collective action is made possible by their mutual recognition of a Divine Actor who joins them in their celebration. And here interactionists studying practices may be able to go considerably beyond functionalists who are worried only about social consequences. We may begin to be able to ask, for instance, about the nature of the practices in which people are convinced of the stability and rightness of the social world in contrast to those practices that open the possibility for change. In the cosmic conversation that takes place in worship, divine actors are experienced as entering the human drama. The

perspective experienced in extraordinary encounters with divine forces - whether from one's direct experience or mediated through sacred stories and rituals - is a perspective that often makes critique and creative action possible (Berger 1969: 99-100). As places of religious ritual practices, then, congregations are potential sites for social and personal transformation, places where new practices and new rhetorics can be invented. Victor Turner (1977) captured the transformative power of ritual in his notions of "anti-structure" and "communitas." Ritual intentionally alters the usual social arrangements and allows the envisioning and experiencing of a different state of being (communitas). Durkheim (1915) called the ritual state "collective effervescence" to denote its volatile potential.

Organized collective religious practice - what congregations and other bodies do - involves situations in which ritual and other religious activity introduce transcendent perspectives into social life. It involves social structures that make charitable activity possible and likely. And it involves the creation of social spaces in which human beings can be known and cared for by persons beyond their families. Sociologists, then, need to look for the patterns of roles and structures in which these practices take place, both within recognized religious organizations and in other organizational spaces where religious persons, motives, and practices find expression. "Organized religion" is much more than simply the list of churches and synagogues in the Yellow Pages.

This, by the way, is one of the reasons Robert Putnam is so wrong about the state of voluntary organizations in the US.[6] By taking inventory of the health of a given list of voluntary organizations, he utterly misses the dynamic and innovative character of this country's voluntary sector. In contrast to his finding of pervasive decline in everything from the League of Women Voters to the PTA, we found a different picture in the changing communities we studied. When we studied the effects of community change on the congregations in those communities, we, too, would have painted a picture of gloom and doom if we restricted our analysis only to the organizations that had existed before the change took place. What we discovered instead is that one of the primary wags change takes place is through organizational deaths and births (Ammerman 1997). Just because a given organization declines and dies does not mean that three more have not emerged in its place. People are constantly taking the religious capital they own and reinvesting it. Religious vitality is best measured at the community level, in terms of the total population of organizations and the overall presence of religious practices rather than at the level of individual organizational health. Looking for organized religious practices takes that ecological reality more seriously.

ORGANIZED RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN SOCIETY

If organized religion is best seen in structured practices that occur throughout the larger social milieux, what we have also implied is that the line between "church" and "society," between sacred and secular, is not so neatly drawn as we might have thought. Practices of religious discernment may take place in the boardroom. Practices of religious charity may take place at Wal-Mart. Practices of religious solidarity may happen in the ladies room, and practices invoking transcendence may happen on the subway. By moving beyond a static "religious institution" and "religious actor" model of how religion occurs in everyday life, we can begin to see both the ways in which everyday rhetorics and practices may overwhelm any reference to transcendence and the way in which religious practices may crop up where no one would have predicted if we were waiting for a religious organization or professional to be the designated actor.

To explore this third level of religious activity, I want to return to the religious practices we

have just delineated and suggest that they are, in fact, remarkably portable, that they permeate the communities in which religious participants live.

First, fellowship activities. Religionists call it fellowship, but social theorists call it social capital. Voluntary organizations - from choirs to PTAs to ethnic heritage societies to congregations - are among the places where relationships of trust are formed, where a sense of identity is nurtured. These relationships of trust are social capital in its most basic form.

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6 For the original argument, see Putnam, 1995. My argument against Putnam is elaborated in Ammerman, 1996.

They facilitate communication and coordination of activities in society, and they provide basic well-being to their participants.[7] Both individuals and society as a whole benefit from the sheer fact of belonging, and the wide variety of organizations to which we can belong gives expression to the vast diversity present in our society. The practices involved in building a community of trust are practices that are often deeply rooted in religious traditions, but they are also necessary, modern, and portable across organizational contexts.

To illustrate, we can examine a particular kind of social capital, namely civic skills. Beyond association and trust, civic skills involve especially the arts of communication, planning, and decision-making, skills engendered through such concrete activities as letter-writing, participating in decision-making meetings, planning and chairing meetings, and giving presentations or speeches (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). These are skills often learned in school and on the job, but they are also skills that can be learned through participation in voluntary organizations. Every club that plans a special event, every society that needs officers, and every congregation that asks its members to teach classes and chair committees provides opportunities for the development and exercise of civic skills. And because congregations are the single most available opportunity for voluntary participation, they are the single most egalitarian imparter of civic skills in this society. By engaging in the practices of building up the fellowship, congregations also build up their communities. "Religious" practices transcend religious institutional lines.

If "fellowship" practices are portable, then there can be little doubt that charitable practices are almost by definition activities that take place at the intersection of religious and community contexts. And that intersection is a very busy one. Nearly all congregations report providing some sort of human service activities; over sixty percent report social benefit programs, such as promoting civil rights; half report educational programs that reach beyond their own congregation; and nearly that many support arts and cultural programs. From affordable housing to shelters for abused women, from food pantries to refugee resettlement, congregations are often the organizational vehicles for the ameliorative work that needs to be done in a community. In many cases this is support given through coalitions, rather than directly provided, but the extent to which congregations are involved in the provision of social services is broad indeed (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993: 19-20). In addition to direct services, they provide material resources to the efforts of others, as well. They provide meeting space and transportation, bulletin boards and public address systems, copying machines and paper. The material resources of congregations and other voluntary organizations provide an infrastructure for doing the work of the community, an infrastructure often made most visible in times of crisis. Our culture sees helping the needy as a religious virtue and expects religious organizations to be engaged in service activities (Wuthnow 1994a: 236). As a center for the teaching and mobilizing of charitable practices, congregations contribute to the efforts of their communities to

make themselves more humane places to live.

So far, I have argued that religious organizations, specifically congregations, provide the social space for learning practices of fellowship, civic skill, and charity practices that are then carried into other arenas that are not specifically religious. One might, of course, argue that these virtues themselves are not specifically religious, that all voluntary organizations create opportunities for learning similar civic and charitable rhetorics and skills. It is a point I will not debate. The fact that they are portable skills indicates the degree to which an argument over "religious or not religious" may not be fruitful.[8]

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7 For a basic discussion of social capital, see Coleman, (1988). See also Ellison and George (1994).

8 Hall (1994) strongly argues for the influence of religious ideals on American notions of civic virtue. The interesting fact for our purposes as sociologists of religion is that organizations that claim to be religious turn out to be social spaces in which the rhetoric and sanction of religious good surrounds certain practices -- practices which in turn affect the shape of society. People learn that loving one's neighbor is not only functional, but pleasing to God. They learn that giving alms is not just good for a tax write-off, but a religious duty.

Finally, what about the religious practices of worship? Here there may be little disagreement about the distinctively religious character of what we observe, but perhaps more skepticism about the degree to which such practices are relevant to understanding what happens in arenas not specifically religious. I want to argue, however, that even these practices cannot be neatly confined to a realm we call "otherworldly." Like all the other either/or dichotomies, that one serves us no better. Those very "otherworldly" experiences are often in clear dialogue with the situations of everyday life.[9] Numerous researchers have noted the power of religious experiences as motivation for individual and collective action in the world.[10] Anthropologists and historians have chronicled the ways in which colonial people have appropriated the symbols and stories of their colonizers as their own tools of transcendence and resistance (e.g., Fields 1985; Comaroff 1985). African Watchtowerites may have said that they were ceasing work just to wait for the Messiah's return, but their action also brought an oppressive economic system at least temporarily to its knees. Whether candlelight vigils in East Germany or the strains of "We Shall Overcome" or the sight of a sinner repenting at the altar, it is clear that the gestures and sights and sounds of religious ritual are experienced as powerful by the participants. These are practices that implicate this world in the very midst of providing points of transcendence. In the cosmic conversation that takes place in worship, divine actors enter the human drama and often become partners for change.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this paper, I have returned to the ways in which our conceptual schemes have failed us. Yes, this is a "new paradigm" (Warner 1993) I am trying to describe. But here at the close I want to venture the speculation that the context for that new paradigm is nothing less than the decentering of modernism as our primary interpretive frame. Modern frames assumed functional differentiation, individualism, and rationalism as "the way things are." Modern frames looked for bureaucratically organized institutions with clear lists of members and tasks. Modern frames looked for a clear line between rational, this-worldly, action and action guided by any other form of wisdom. Modem frames looked for the individualized "meaning system" that would be carved out of differentiation and pluralism. I hesitate to invoke the word postmodern, given all its baggage, but it seems to me a useful concept here. The root of our problems with the either/or concepts with which we work is that we now live in a both/and world.

We live in a world where organizational boundaries are more fluid, where mergers and out-sourcing and flextime and telecommuting are as common as the time clock and the stockholder corporation. We live in a world where rationality and the scientific method are valued, but also critiqued, where multiple sources of wisdom are finding a voice. We live in a world where people are both more rooted in particularistic ethnic and religious communities that refused to melt and more aware of the larger world and the choices that have brought them to their current practices. They are, to use Warner's (1988) extremely helpful term, "elective parochials."

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9 The relevance of "otherworldly" practices for this worldly activity was, of course, a major insight of Weber (1905 [1958]), although he persisted in conceptually separating the two. The intersection of these two worlds is also picked up in Bourdieu's (1979) theory of practice.

10 See, for example Wood (1994) and Alexander (1991). For Harding (1992), ritual/s social action, accomplishing the transformation in its very performance.

In such a world, old analytical notions of identity, organization, and function are not nearly as helpful as an analysis based on practice. Practices are both structured and fluid. Practices require choosing agents, but situate those agents in social and cultural contexts. What I have tried to suggest here are some of the ways in which our study of religion might be transformed by recognizing the full implications of the postmodern world that modern voluntarism has created.

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