1 *The Nature of Religion*

At least since the Enlightenment, most Western intellectuals have anticipated the death of religion as eagerly as ancient Israel awaited the messiah. Social scientists have particularly excelled in predicting the impending triumph of reason over "superstition." The most illustrious figures in sociology, anthropology, and psychology have unanimously expressed confidence that their children, or surely their grandchildren, would live to see the dawn of a new era in which, to paraphrase Freud, the infantile illusions of religion would be outgrown.

But, as one generation has followed another, religion has persisted. A third of Americans claim they are "born again" Christians, and 90 percent pray regularly. During the nationwide strikes in Poland, the workers did not raise the red flag, but the blue banner of Our Lady. The Soviet press angrily admits that 70 years of intensive education in atheism and severe repression of religion are a resounding failure. Nevertheless, most intellectuals remain confident that religion lives on borrowed time, and every sign of weakness in major religious organizations is diagnosed as terminal. All contrary indications, be they revivals of conventional religion or a lush growth of new religions, are dismissed as superficial. Fashionable opinion holds the trend toward secularism to be rapid and inevitable.

The argument developed in this book is very unfashionable. With Daniel Bell (1971, 1980), we think the vision of a religionless future is but illusion. We acknowledge that secularization is a major trend in modern times, but argue that this is not a modern development and

does not presage the demise of religion. Rather, as we attempt to demonstrate throughout this book, secularization is a process found in all religious economies; it is something that is always going on in all societies. While secularization progresses in some parts of a society, a countervailing intensification of religion goes on in other parts. Sometimes the pace of secularization speeds or slows, but the dominant religious organizations in any society are always becoming progressively more worldly, which is to say, more secularized. The result of this trend has never been the end of religion, but merely a shift in fortunes among religions as faiths that have become too worldly are supplanted by more vigorous and less worldly religions.

In this book, we demonstrate that secularization is only one of three fundamental and interrelated processes that constantly occur in all religious economies. The process of secularization is self-limiting and generates two countervailing processes. One of these is *revival*. Religious organizations that are eroded by secularization abandon a substantial market demand for less worldly religion, a demand that produces breakaway sect movements. Thus, out of secularization is born revival as protest groups form to restore vigorous otherworldliness to a conventional faith.

Secularization also stimulates *religious innovation*. Not only do worldly churches prompt new religious groups, which seek to revive faith, but secularization also prompts the formation of new religious traditions. New religions constantly appear in societies. Whether they make any headway depends on the vigor of conventional religious organizations. When new faiths that are better adapted to current market demand spring up, older faiths are eclipsed. Thus did Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and the other great world faiths wrest dominant market positions from older faiths.

In the beginning, all religions are obscure, tiny, deviant cult movements. Caught at the right moment, Jesus would have been found leading a handful of ragtag followers in a remote corner of the mighty Roman Empire. How laughable it would have seemed to Roman intellectuals that this obscure cult could pose a threat to the great pagan temples. In similar fashion, Western intellectuals scorn contemporary cults. Yet, if major new faiths are aborning, they will not be found by consulting the directory of the National Council of Churches. Rather, they will be found in lists of obscure cult movements. Thus, to assess the future of religion, one must always pay close attention to the fringes of religious economies (cf. Tiryakian, 1972; Yinger, 1977).

Social scientists have misread the future of religion, not only because they so fervently desire religion to disappear, but also because they have

failed to recognize the dynamic character of religious economies. To focus only on secularization is to fail to see how this process is part of a much larger and reciprocal structure. Having erroneously equated religion with a particular set of religious organizations, Western intellectuals have misread the secularization of these groups as the doom of religion in general. But it is foolish to look only at sunsets and never observe the dawn: the history of religion is not only a pattern of decline; it is equally a portrait of birth and growth. We argue that the sources of religion are shifting constantly in societies but that the amount of religion remains relatively constant.

DEFINING RELIGION

Most scholars limit the term *religion* to those systems of thought embodied in social organizations that posit the existence of the supernatural (Goody, 1961; Stark, 1965b; Spiro, 1966; Berger, 1967). But an articulate minority demands the definition of religion to be broad enough to include scientific humanism, Marxism, and other nonsupernatural philosophies (Luckmann, 1967; Bellah, 1970b; Yinger, 1970). This is a critical dispute. Unless it is resolved, we cannot determine whether a theory of religious movements ought also to include movements such as those inspired by intense, but antisupernatural, political creeds.

Elsewhere (Stark, 1965b; Stark and Bainbridge, 1980) we have argued against lumping supernatural and naturalistic faiths under the common term *religion* — that to do so makes it needlessly difficult to explore conflicts between these contrary systems of thought or to identify the rather different capacities present in each. Now we are prepared to go much further. As Emile Durkheim (1915) correctly proclaimed, there can be no church of magic (see Chapter 2). We are prepared to assert that there can be no wholly naturalistic religion; that a religion lacking supernatural assumptions is no religion at all. Throughout this book, we demonstrate that the differences between supernatural and nonsupernatural (or naturalistic) systems are so profound that it makes no more sense to equate them than to equate totem poles and telephone poles. Indeed, in Part V, we demonstrate that naturalistic meaning systems, be they scientific rationalism, established religions shorn of their conceptions of an active supernatural, or militantly irreligious political elites in control of repressive states, cannot supplant supernaturalism. That is, naturalistic systems cannot replace supernaturalistic systems in the hearts of most human beings. If they cannot function as religious, then they must not be religions.

Scrutiny of the immense literature on the proper definition of reli-

gion reveals two key problems. First, the definition must be general. As Georg Simmel (1905: 359) pointed out long ago, we need "a definition which, without vagueness and yet with sufficient comprehensiveness, has told once for all what religion is in its essence, in that which is common alike to the religions of Christians and South Sea islanders, to Buddhism and Mexican idolatry." Clearly, it will not serve sociology to define religion as belief in Christ or even belief in a supreme being. Many groups that obviously are religious do not even know the Christ story and worship an array of supernatural powers of whom no single god is superior to others. Yet the definition of religion must not be too broad. In our judgment, this is the pit into which many modern scholars have fallen. They propose definitions that easily accommodate the vast numbers of faiths we would like to include as religions, but their definitions apply as easily to ideologies that seem better excluded.

The first powerful proponent of an overbroad definition of religion was Emile Durkheim, who is considered one of the founders of modern sociology. In his classic work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), Durkheim heaped scorn and ridicule on those eminent 19th-century scholars who held that religions must possess some conception of the supernatural, or what the great anthropologist Sir E. B. Tylor called "Spiritual Beings." Durkheim scolded Tylor and others for failing to realize that Buddhism lacks all traces of supernatural belief, yet it must be counted as a religion. Later scholars recognized that Durkheim was simply wrong about Buddhism — that he mistook the "religious" views of a small group of philosophers and court intellectuals for popular Buddhism (Spiro, 1966).

Durkheim (1915: 273) noted that "there is no known society without a religion," and he (1915: 466) asserted that "religion has given birth to all that is essential in society." He also assumed that all healthy cultures are unitary, all members sharing a single creed. From this perspective, evidence that some philosophers in a Buddhist society were atheistic would imply that Buddhist societies were atheistic, and thus that there exist atheist religions. From this logic, it is a short step to abandon popular definitions of religion and to define it without reference to the supernatural. Of course, a definition derived in this way is a poor conceptual tool for measuring variations in religiosity and of little use for understanding such processes of change as secularization and revival.

Durkheim sought to explain the ubiquity of religion by asserting that it performs the essential function of representing the society to its members in the form of sacred symbols that support a moral code and a sense of tribal unity. But if a culture contains several different doctrines, one cannot assume without good evidence that each doctrine serves

these functions and deserves to be called a religion. In societies such as ours and that of classical India, there exist schools of thought, promulgated by professional scholars and intellectuals, that recast traditional religious ideas as philosophical systems having no reference to supernatural deities. Far from representing the dominant religious thinking of their societies, these philosophical systems are the extreme in secularization. Perhaps some members of the intellectual elite favor them, but they may have little impact on social behavior.

As Berger (1967: 177) points out about Luckmann's (1967) too-inclusive definition of religion, if one defines all "self-transcendent symbolic universes" as religions, then one immediately is forced to say how science, for example, is "*different* from what has been called religion by everyone else . . . which poses the definitional problem all over again." Or, as Swanson (1960) suggests, if members of the American Association of Atheists, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade are all defined as members of religious organizations, we lose the conceptual tools we need to explore the constant and profound conflicts among them.

How can we distinguish between religions and other ideological systems? In our judgment, the answer was correctly given by the 19th-century founders of the social scientific study of religion, those men whose position Durkheim attempted to bury: *religions involve some conception of a supernatural being, world, or force, and the notion that the supernatural is active, that events and conditions here on earth are influenced by the supernatural.* Or, as Sir James G. Frazer (1922: 58) put it, "religion consists of two elements . . . a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them."

EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF RELIGION

Our studies of religious movements are based on an effort to test empirically our deductive theory of religion. Our basic theory leads us to a definition that attempts to isolate the fundamental features of how religion serves human needs. We shall sketch the logical chain by which our definition arises, and we gave a more formal statement in one of our technical essays (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980).

We begin with a mundane axiom about human behavior: *Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and try to avoid what they perceive to be costs.* In various forms, this is one of the oldest and still most central propositions about human behavior. It is the starting point for microeconomics, learning psychology, and sociological theories (Homans,

1950, 1961). However, when we inspect more closely this human tendency to seek rewards, we see two important points:

1. In all societies, many rewards are scarce and unequally distributed. Substantial proportions of any population have far less of some rewards than they would like to have and less of these rewards than some other people actually possess. Scarcity, both absolute and relative, is a social universal.

2. Some intensely desired rewards seem not to be available at all. For example, no one can demonstrate whether there is life after death, but everyone can see that immortality cannot be gained in the here and now, in the natural world available to our senses. But the simple unavailability of the reward of eternal life has not caused people to cease wanting it. To the contrary, it is probably the single most urgent human desire.

Noting the strong desires for rewards that are available to many, as well as those that seem not to be directly available to anyone, we can recognize another characteristic human action: the creation and exchange of *compensators*. People may experience rewards, but they can only have faith in compensators. *A compensator is the belief that a reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified.*

We do not use the word *compensator* in any pejorative sense. By it we simply mean to recognize that, when highly desired rewards seem unavailable through direct means, persons tend to develop explanations about how they can gain this reward later or elsewhere. Compensators are a form of IOU. They promise that, in return for value surrendered now, the desired rewards will be obtained eventually. Often people must make regular payments to keep a compensator valid, which makes it possible to bind them to long-term involvement in an organization that serves as a source of compensators. Put another way, humans will often exchange rewards of considerable value over a long period of time in return for compensators in the hope that a reward of immense value will be forthcoming in return.

Compensators are by no means exclusively, or even primarily, religious in nature. They are generated and exchanged throughout the range of human institutions. When a radical political movement instructs followers to work for the revolution now, in return for material rewards later, compensators have been exchanged for rewards. The party receives direct rewards; the followers receive an IOU. Or a compensator is exchanged for a reward when people have their bodies frozen in a cryogenic vault until science discovers how to cure their disease

or overcome the aging process. Similarly, when a parent tells a child, "Be good; work hard; one day you will be rich and famous," a compensator-reward exchange is proposed. Sometimes, of course, compensators are redeemed — the promised reward is obtained. But, unless or until they are redeemed, compensators figure in exchange processes as IOUs; that is, they are easily distinguished from the actual reward that is being promised.

In our system, compensators fall along a continuum from the specific to the general. Specific compensators promise a specific, limited reward. The most general compensators promise a great array of rewards or rewards of vast scope. A shaman's promise that, if certain ritual procedures are followed, a person will be cured of warts is a specific compensator. The promise of a happy life is a general compensator. In Chapter 2 and elsewhere in this book, we have found the distinction between general and specific compensators vital in distinguishing between magic and religion, which in turn makes it possible to deduce Durkheim's claim that there can be no church of magic.

When we examine human desires, we see that people often seek rewards of such magnitude and apparent unavailability that *only by assuming the existence of an active supernatural can credible compensators be created.* For example, since time immemorial, humans have desired to know the meaning of existence. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Where will it all end? Moreover, people have not just wanted answers to these questions; they have desired particular kinds of answers — that life have meaning. But for life to have a great design, for there to be intention behind history, one must posit the existence of a designer or intender of such power, duration, and scale as to be outside or beyond the natural world of our senses. Similarly, for humans to survive death, it is, at least thus far in history, necessary to posit supernatural agencies. Indeed, to accept that earthly suffering gains meaning as prelude to everlasting glory is to embrace the supernatural. Archeological evidence that our rude Neanderthal ancestors buried their dead with elaborate ceremony and with food and possessions to be used in the next world suggests that such concerns typify humans far back into prehistory.

Although in our more technical essays we are able to derive this line of reasoning from our theory, surely the point can stand on its own merit: Some common human desires are so beyond direct, this-worldly satisfaction that only the gods can provide them. This simple point has profound implications.

So long as humans intensely seek certain rewards of great magnitude that remain unavailable through direct actions, they will be able to ob-

tain credible compensators only from sources predicated on the supernatural. In this market, no purely naturalistic ideologies can compete. Systems of thought that reject the supernatural lack all means to credibly promise such rewards as eternal life in any fashion. Similarly, naturalistic philosophies can argue that statements such as "What is the meaning of life?" or "What is the purpose of the universe?" are meaningless utterances. But they cannot provide answers to these questions in the terms in which they are asked.

This profound difference in compensator-generating capacity is why we have chosen to define religions as *human organizations primarily engaged in providing general compensators based on supernatural assumptions*. Our intention is to isolate those systems of thought that have the capacity to deal with human desires of maximum scope, intensity, and scarcity from those systems lacking such a capacity. The fact that this definition parallels what the term *religion* has always meant in everyday speech is probably not accidental. Social scientists are not uniquely qualified to recognize fundamental features of human societies. Indeed, we suspect that only by letting his social scientific rhetoric obscure real life could Durkheim have failed to notice that religions are a unique source of maximum compensators. This was clear in that atheistic versions of Buddhist philosophy failed to attract any substantial mass following despite being sponsored by powerful and eloquent intellectuals.

These theoretical considerations lead to many dramatic conclusions we shall explore in later chapters. Consider but one of these, which is the major theme pursued in Part V: Movements lacking supernatural assumptions cannot successfully compete, over the long run, in generating mass commitment when confronted by movements that accept the supernatural. To be more specific: So long as humans persist in desires not directly satisfiable, the eventual fate of "demythologized" religious organizations is sealed. Or one can conclude that, although modern-day Communism is in conflict with religion, it is not itself a religion and remains permanently vulnerable to religious competitors, especially once Communist regimes come to power (see Chapter 22). To sum up, our analysis suggests that not only is the notion of a nonsupernatural or naturalistic religion a logical contradiction, but in fact efforts to create such "religions" will fail for want of that vital resource that always has been the sine qua non of religions: the gods.

Thus, the study of religious movements is restricted to organized groups that offer general compensators based on supernatural assumptions. In Chapter 2, we elaborate this definition of religious movements to recognize several different varieties.

DIMENSIONS OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

Thus far in defining religion, we have focused on the unique capacity of supernatural belief systems to provide people with compensators for scarce or wholly unavailable rewards. Another way to examine religion is to observe how people express their religiousness, how they manifest their commitment to religious organizations. Charles Y. Glock (1959, 1962) made the first important attempt to distinguish the variety of ways people can be religious. Glock wanted to resolve a dispute between those who thought a major religious revival had occurred in the United States after World War II because rates of church membership and attendance rose rapidly and those who lamented the loss of faith they believed had taken place during this same time. Glock recognized that people often mean different things by a term such as *religiousness* and that these different modes may vary independently.

Glock began by asking university students to write answers to the question, "When someone is described as a religious person, what do you assume about them?" In attempting to classify the many answers he received, Glock found that five distinct *dimensions* (or modes) of religious expression were invoked. He used these five dimensions to point out that it was possible both for religious participation to increase and for religious belief to decrease — hence that those debating about a religious revival were talking past one another (Glock, 1959).

In later work, Stark and Glock (1968) further refined and measured these five dimensions. Although religious organizations differ in the emphasis they place on various aspects of religious commitment, all expect members to display some commitment in each of these ways: belief, practice, experience, knowledge, and consequences.

   1. The *belief* dimension of commitment consists of the expectation that the religious person will accept certain doctrines as true.
   2. The *practice* dimension includes acts of worship and devotion directed toward the supernatural. Two important subtypes exist here. *Ritual* practices refer to formal ceremonies, rites, and sacred activities — such things as baptism, attending worship services, and taking communion. *Devotional* practices are informal, often spontaneous, and frequently done in private. Bible reading and private prayer are common examples.
   3. The *experience* dimension takes into account that individuals often believe they have achieved direct, subjective contact with the supernatural. Often these are no more than intense but diffuse feelings of special awareness of divine existence — the "born again" experience, for exam-

ple. But sometimes, too, people experience what they define as direct communication with the supernatural; they may even gain new revelations of divine intention and meaning.

4. The *knowledge* dimension indicates that people are expected to know and understand central elements of their religious culture — in the case of Christians, who preached the Sermon on the Mount or the name of the town in which Jesus was born.

5. *Consequences* refer to religious actions in everyday life. All religions direct people to behave in certain ways (to tell the truth, to give alms to the poor) and not to behave in certain other ways (not to drink or fornicate).

Research has found that, empirically, there is much independence among these different dimensions of religious commitment. People who are high on one are not necessarily high on any others (Stark and Glock, 1968). Initially, the recognition that there may be multiple dimensions of religion alerted sociologists of religion to base their research on many measures of religious commitment, rather than on only one. And, indeed, it often turned out that very contradictory findings were produced when results using one dimension were compared with results based on another. The clearest example is research exploring the relationship between religious commitment and social class.

Social Class and Modes of Faith

For a long time, sociologists of religion took it for granted that a primary function of religion was to comfort the poor for their relative deprivations. In so doing, they echoed not only Marx's condemnation of religion as nothing but "an opium of the people" but also St. Paul's belief that religion has greatest appeal to the "weak things of the world." Then, with the development of empirical social research in the 1940s, a series of investigators found the lower classes noticeably absent from church (cf. Stark, 1964). It is the wealthy, not the poor, who are most likely to be found in the pews on Sunday morning. This discovery threatened a major sociological proposition, for if the poor get the most out of religion, they must be doing so without benefit of clergy.

Then several of Glock's students salvaged this sociological proposition by noting that rich and poor tend to express their religion in different ways or along different dimensions (Demerath, 1965; Stark, 1964, 1972). Thus, for example, lower-class people are more likely than upper-class people to pray in private, to believe in the doctrines of their faith, and to have intense religious experiences. But the upper classes display greater religious commitment when it comes to church member-

ship, church attendance, and all other aspects of the ritual dimension (Stark, 1972).

Although Glock's initial five dimensions made it easy to spot these contrary tendencies, his scheme did not lend itself very well to isolating and explaining them. The data strongly hint that different social classes get different things from religion. But how can these be identified?

Part of the answer can be found in our discussion of compensators earlier in this chapter. We noted that religion offers compensators for scarce rewards — those for which some people experience relative deprivation. Religion also offers compensators for rewards that seem not to exist at all in this world. In terms of these rewards, all humans, rich and poor alike, are potentially deprived. But religious organizations provide more than compensators. Any organization that provides a stage for human action and interaction will provide numerous direct rewards. As we explore in length in Chapter 14, religious movements deal not only in compensators, in intangibles, but also in very tangible, direct rewards. Thus, people can gain a variety of rewards from religious commitment. They can earn a living from religion. Religions offer human companionship, status as an upright person of good character (Weber, 1946: 303–305), leisure and recreational activity, opportunities for marriage, courtship, and business contacts — a whole host of things people value.

While analyzing what people can get out of religion, we must realize that this can be influenced greatly by their *power*. We use this term rather broadly to mean a superior ability to win rewards in social exchanges based on all the talents and resources that allow some people to profit more than others in social interactions (cf. Blau, 1964). Because power means the ability to gain rewards, it is especially critical in the case of scarce rewards. It follows that the powerful will tend to monopolize the rewards available from religion, just as they tend to monopolize those from all other sources. Our theory leads to the deduction that people will prefer rewards over compensators and that they will seek the former whenever possible. This means that the more privileged people will have less need and desire for those compensators religion offers for rewards that are only scarce. Privileged people will succeed in getting the scarce rewards themselves. Persons who lack the means to get the rewards must content themselves with compensators for these rewards. Such compensators will have their greatest utility among the poor and powerless. But we also can see that power is irrelevant in the case of rewards that seem not to exist at all. Neither rich nor poor can gain eternal life in this world. All have equal need of compensators for this desire.

These ideas are captured in three propositions we are able to deduce from our formal theory of religion. Each concerns the relationship between power and religious commitment:

1. The power of an individual or a group will be *positively* associated with control of religious organizations and with gaining the rewards available from religious organizations.

2. The power of an individual or group will be *negatively* associated with accepting religious compensators when the desired reward exists.

3. Regardless of power, persons and groups will tend to accept religious compensators when desired rewards do not exist.

These three propositions are consistent with the empirical literature and help make the many conflicting findings coherent. The data consistently show that the powerful dominate religious rewards (excel in membership and attendance) and the powerless dominate religious compensators for scarcity (excel in prayer and belief). But powerful and powerless are equally likely to believe in life after death — a compensator for unavailable rewards (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980).

A New Approach

We may now translate these theoretical propositions into a tidy conceptual scheme for identifying dimensions of religious commitment. The second proposition captures the long intellectual tradition asserting that religion serves to comfort the poor for their relative deprivations — for their deficits in scarce rewards. We can name this the *other-worldly dimension* of religious commitment to identify the way compensators can assuage worldly suffering by emphasizing the better life to come. As we see in following chapters, this dimension of religious commitment is dominant in sects.

However, the first proposition lets us see that religion is not wholly a response to deprivation. Rather, this proposition reflects the religious expression of privilege. We can name this the *worldly dimension* of religious commitment to identify the importance of the tangible rewards of which it consists. This mode of commitment tends to be dominant in churches.

These two dimensions are really opposite sides of the same coin — expressions of relative deprivation and its antithesis. But religious commitment is too complex to be captured adequately by these two dimensions alone. Indeed, one well may wonder why the powerful bother with religion at all. Surely they could gain as many, perhaps even more, rewards by participating in purely secular organizations and pursuits.

The third proposition explains this phenomenon. In terms of the most intense human desires, everyone is potentially deprived. Here we isolate what we can call the *universal dimension* of religious commitment, religious compensators capable of binding powerful and powerless alike to religious organizations.

These three dimensions consolidate Glock's important recognition that religious commitment is not a unidimensional phenomenon. They also have affinity with Gordon W. Allport's (1960: 33) distinction between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* types of religious faith. Allport characterized extrinsic faith as "utilitarian, self-serving, conferring safety, status, comfort and talismanic favors upon the believer. . . . People who are religious in this sense make use of God. . . . [They are] dependent and basically infantile."

In his view, the intrinsic type of religion "can steer one's existence without enslaving him to his limited concepts and egocentric needs. . . . It is the polar opposite of the utilitarian, self-centered, extrinsic view."

Ignoring Allport's contempt for those who accept the invitation of religion to "take it to the Lord in prayer" and his attempt to define liberal Protestantism as indicative of better mental health, we may glimpse affinities between the extrinsic type and our otherworldly dimension. The intrinsic type is more heavily weighted on the universal and the worldly dimensions.

Both Glock and Allport arrived at their dimensions of religious commitment inductively, as summaries of empirical data. This approach is valid if one's scientific purpose is the systematic description of how a particular culture conceptualizes religious experience, that is, if one is working as an ethnographer. Today a number of statistical tools, such as factor analysis, are used to reduce the opinions of numerous respondents to a single cognitive structure (cf. King, 1967). But when such studies are replicated on different populations, they tend to give different results. In so doing, they may accurately chart cultural differences in the nature of religion and in how it is conceptualized. Done properly, this line of research permits sensitive intercultural comparisons, thus adding to the tools available for systematic ethnology.

We derived our conceptual scheme from a formal theory rather than through distillation of the folk ideas of any single culture. Thus, it is designed as an objective analytic tool for understanding all varieties of religion. The trouble with inductive conceptual schemes is that an infinite number of alternatives can be found, and there is no way to choose among them. Unlike hypotheses (statements that assert a relationship linking two or more concepts), mere definitions can be neither true nor

false. Each notes a distinction someone has made and simply gives it a name. But if we want to develop scientific explanations, the test of the concepts is their utility for effective theorizing. Concepts that are not incorporated into theories may or may not be useful for theorizing; there is no way to tell. Because our conceptualization derives from a theory of religion, it is fruitful to the extent that the theory is successful.

In later chapters, we show that these three dimensions of religious commitment serve as an essential starting point for a theory of church and sect movements. They tell use to expect an "internal contradiction" within all religious organizations — the presence of groups with a conflict of interest over whom the organization is to serve and how. Some will want emphasis on the otherworldly dimension. Some will want major emphasis on the worldly dimension. These two dimensions tend to be incompatible and one can be emphasized only at the cost of de-emphasizing the other. Thus, the seeds of internal conflict and for the transformation of religious organizations are inherent in the composition of religious organizations. Our dimensions efficiently identify this conflict; we see the correspondence between our definition of religion and our analysis of individual religious commitment.

AN ASIDE ON FAITH

Readers must not let our use of the term *compensator* in our definition of religion cause them to assume we therefore imply that religion is false. As will be clear in many subsequent chapters, it is impossible to demonstrate that the most general compensators are false. Science is completely helpless in the face of claims made on behalf of a being, world, or force beyond the natural world (cf. Dodd, 1961). We may send cameras through the far reaches of space to photograph the rings of Saturn and the moons of Jupiter, but they cannot be sent to reveal the face of God or the topography of heaven. Religion, in its purest forms, lies beyond the reach of all science and surely is not vulnerable to the definitions of two social scientists. It is not our intent to suggest anything about the truth of religion. We seek only to discover its visible aspects — the social forms it takes in the world we all can see. We leave its invisible aspects to others to comprehend or dispute. That we must discuss in Chapter 8 that some people who found religions are rascals gives us no ability to pass upon the authenticity of the private religious visions of other religious founders. The thrust of this book is that religion will prosper and endure no matter what social scientists, or any others, have to say about faith.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

The next chapter continues the definitional task already begun. In it, we distinguish two primary forms of deviant religious movements: *sects* and *cults*. First, we see how these can be distinguished from religious institutions or churches. Then we see why it is vital to distinguish one form of deviant religious group from another. Finally, we distinguish between cults that are fully developed religious movements and other cult groups and activities that represent magic, not religion. In the remainder of the book, we use these distinctions, and we show that they are very sensitive to empirical nuances. They often permit us to make sense of what otherwise might appear to be only odd blips and glitches in the data.

In order to understand religious movements, we must examine the interplay between them and their environments. For example, one cannot discuss religious deviance without knowledge of the conventional standards against which this deviance is judged. One cannot fully understand religious deviance unless one knows the extent to which the coercive powers of the state are used against religious nonconformity. Is the state repressive or permissive of novel religions? But even where religious freedom is greatest, new religions must find a niche in the religious economy in order to survive. Thus, Part I examines the religious economy of the United States and Canada. In Chapter 3, we examine the diversity of faiths making up the religious spectrum and demonstrate the utility of the notion of tension with the environment to order the huge array of competing faiths. Chapter 4 is devoted to important regional variations in conventional religion and serves as a preface to later chapters that examine where and when sects and cults thrive.

In Part II, we take up sects. Chapter 5 explains why religious organizations tend to move into low tension with their environments. We then see how low tension religious groups are unable to provide as efficacious compensators for scarcity as high tension groups readily offer. This permits us to see the conditions under which religious schisms develop — sects are schismatic groups that leave a lower tension group in order to form one in higher tension. We examine where sect leaders come from and why. The chapter also considers the relatively rare circumstances in which church movements break off from sects. In the latter part of the chapter, we consider the chronic threat sect movements pose to monopoly churches. We then specifically examine the medieval church and the many ways it devised to rechannel sect movements and to serve everyone's religious needs. We shall see that the Reformation was not a sudden breakdown in the universality of the Catholic church.

The church was never able to monopolize religious activities and was unable either to provide adequate magic or to eliminate magical competitors, all of which culminated in the Inquisition.

Chapter 6 moves up to the present and examines the first large, quantified set of data on American-born sect movements. How many are there? Where are they? How big are they? How many are growing? What are the most common varieties? Chapter 7 introduces and tests a fragment of our theory of religious movements. What mechanisms account for the transformation of sects into churches? The chapter identifies the forces that cause the social class composition of sects to rise over time and shows how this reduces their tension with the outside world.

Part III is devoted to cults. Chapter 8 is conceptual and theoretical. In it, we identify three models of cult formation — how new religions are created. First, we examine the process by which people believe they have received a new religious insight and how they are able to share their conviction with others. Then we examine how people create new religions in much the same way as they might start any commercial venture. Finally, we examine the dynamic processes by which certain small groups of people evolve a new religious doctrine and come to believe in it. We show that these three models summarize a huge, but disorganized, literature on religious innovation and that they differ from one another only in their emphasis on common elements.

Chapter 9 does for cults what Chapter 6 does for sects. Based on 501 contemporary cult movements, it establishes basic facts. Where do cults flourish? What kinds of cults are forming now as compared with the past? Is cult formation becoming more frequent? Chapter 10 poses similar questions, but about groups that are not (or are not yet) fully developed cult movements — groups we identify as client and audience cults. In Chapter 11, we examine cult membership in the 1920s. Here we chart in detail the rise of some of the most successful American cult movements and demonstrate that there is nothing new about the formation of new religions.

In chapters 12 and 13, we analyze two highly successful and very recent cult movements. Chapter 12 shows how Scientology is able to get thousands of members to agree that they have achieved "clear" status despite their inability to perform the superhuman mental feats claimed to be easy for clears. In Chapter 13, we chart the extraordinary rise and the precipitous fall of Transcendental Meditation, a cult movement that in the mid-1970s was initiating tens of thousands of Americans a month. We explain why the flow of new members suddenly dried up and how this radically changed the movement.

Part IV is concerned with recruitment to sects and cults. How do