CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion

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The conventional wisdom in the historiography of the ancient world is that the emergence of what we call civilization was marked by the rise of the state, government bureaucracy, writing, and a complex division of labor. Less widely noted, but of equal import, was the conversion of tribal and nonstate peoples to more socially expansive and doctrinally formalized religions, including those today identified as "historic" or "world" religions. For many peoples, it would appear, incorporation into a broader social order brought not just technological and political transformations of traditional lifeways but far-reaching adjustments in the canons of divinity, identity, and social ethics as well.[1] Here is a development at the origins of the world we call civilized, but one about which there is surprisingly little intellectual consensus.

What makes this phenomenon all the more intriguing is that conversion to more inclusive or world religions is not just a distant event in an unknowable past but a process that continues in the backlands and barrios of the developing world today. Indeed, though empires and economic orders have come and gone, the world religions have survived. They are, we might say, the longest lasting of civilization's primary institutions. Just why this is so is an important question: it challenges our understanding of "traditional" and "world" religions, forces us to reflect on how people become converted from one form of religion to another, and shows how deeply religious reformation is implicated in the making of the modern world.

This world-building aspect of religious conversion is the focus of the essays in this volume. All examine the twin phenomena of Christian conversion and Christianization—the reformulation of social relations,

cultural meanings, and personal experience in terms of putatively Christian ideals. Though studies of conversion have traditionally privileged its psychology (or, all too often, a reification of that psychology),[2] the authors of these essays explore Christian conversion in its full complexity —sociological and historical, cultural and psychological. Rather than elevate the individual experience of conversion above the social world, they examine how social and individual processes interact over time. The studies reveal that conversion takes many forms. Not always an exclusivistic change of religious affiliation requiring the repudiation of previously held beliefs (Nock 1933), conversion assumes a variety of forms because it is influenced by a larger interplay of identity, politics, and morality.

A second characteristic of these studies is that they explore Christianity as a world religion rather than as a uniquely Eurocentric one.[3] This cross-cultural focus speaks to the reality of Christianity in the premodern and modern eras and to how it has shaped our world. It highlights what is distinctive about Christian conversion and how it relates to the more general reformation of religion and moral authority that marks human history. Why do people convert? Why are some cultures so resistant to Christian appeals while others eagerly embrace the faith? Does the widespread incidence of conversion to Christianity and other world religions suggest convergence in the development of religion, ethics, and authority across cultures?

A comparative understanding of these questions promises to be of interest not only for anthropology and sociology but also for comparative politics, ethical history, and, indeed, our understanding of the civilized world. My intent in the present chapter is to outline something of this broader context. I will emphasize two points from the start. First, though most of the discussion in these essays centers on Christianity, my remarks here are necessarily broader. For the sake of comparison, I speak of Christianity as a species of world religion and seek to explore the differences between world religions and the other great family of religions referred to, much too generally, as traditional.

When used in too bipolar a fashion, the categories of traditional and world religion are simplistic and reinforce certain prejudices of the putative rationality of the modern world and the irrational traditionalism of the premodern. Most such modernist generalities are of little analytic value. But one distinction made between traditional and world religions points to something quite real: only a few religions have shown great success in propagating themselves over time and space. This seemingly obvious aspect of their sociohistorical distribution, we shall see, has had some not-so-obvious influences on the ideals and social organization of the faiths we call world religions.

Situating Christianity in history and in relation to other world religions, the discussion which follows departs somewhat from anthropological research on Christianity and indeed from the focus of some of the other essays in this volume. Recent anthropological work has emphasized that Christianity in a cross-cultural context is far less socially and ideologically monolithic than the "salvationist orthodoxy" (Schneider and Lindenbaum 1987:4) often attributed to it. Contrary to essentialist characterizations of its meaning, Christianity has demonstrated a remarkable ability to take on different cultural shadings in local settings (Badone 1990; Boutilier et al. 1978; Saunders 1988; Schneider and Lindenbaum 1987). The Christian message of individual salvation, for example, has often been marginalized or recast to meet communal needs; elsewhere, believers have been inclined to seek blessing not simply for otherworldly ends but also for "the fulfillment of needs and desires in the here and now" (French Smith 1988:42; cf. Schneider and Lindenbaum 1987:2).

Having refuted the myth of the Christian monolith, however, we must not fall into the converse error of extreme cultural particularism, so thoroughly deconstructing Christianity as to conclude that it is really no more than a congeries of local traditions. Though, in absolute terms, all religions and all cultures are unique, the faiths we know as world religions show striking continuities over time and space. This simple fact indicates their social and moral distinctiveness.

The second point I should stress is that my discussion of the social science commentary on conversion is inevitably selective, designed less to provide an exhaustive history of ideas than to highlight a few recurring themes. Central among these are the nature of the world religions and the source of their remarkable social power. Wherein originates the capacity of these religions to challenge the received lifeways and moral imagination of people incorporating into the civilized social order? Is it a function of the association of these religions with imperial or hegemonic powers? Is conversion, then, first and foremost a colonization of consciousness? Alternately, or in addition, do Christianity and the other world religions embody a cultural logic uniquely adapted to the challenge of the civilized macrocosm?

Whatever our answers to these questions, this much is clear: human history bears witness to the enormous, and sometimes tragic, power of the world religions. Originating in ancient times and thriving still today, they are among the deepest and most enduring of the great transformations that have given us our world. An understanding of these religions and of how people are converted to them must be at the center of any truly comparative study of religion.

CONVERSION TO WORLD RELIGIONS

Though conversion to world religions seems to recur in the civilizing process, understanding it has challenged students of religion and social theory for well over a century. In part this difficulty reflects a chronic lack of agreement on what, if anything, distinguishes traditional and world religions. Does their difference lie, as is often suggested, in the intellectual rigor and social complexity of the world religions? How do we explain the peculiar origins of the world religions in ancient empires and their expansion through to modern times? As these questions indicate, theoretical accounts of conversion have long been entangled in debates concerning the nature of cultural evolution and the rationality of different types of religion.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Western scholars had ready answers to all these questions. In their view world religions could be distinguished by their greater intellectual coherence and moral rigor. Primitive religions, by contrast, were regarded as murky amalgams of magical delusion and fetishist taboo. They lack any real system of ethics, it was said, and develop their doctrines opportunistically as the needs of their practitioners require. As a society's intellectual and technical equipment evolves, however, the need for such traditionalist placebos diminishes. Conversely, the need for a more systematic and ethical cosmology increases, predisposing people to the higher truth of the world faiths (Frazer 1922; Tylor 1913; cf. Douglas 1966; Tambiah 1990).

According to this late–nineteenth-century view, then, both the development of the world religions and, by implication, the decision of an individual or a community to convert are part of an inevitable march toward human enlightenment. Like all of culture the history of religion is one of upward evolution, toward greater reason and deeper ethical awareness. Herein, too, lay the impetus for conversion to world religions.[4]

Although this view of religious evolution reflected assumptions once widespread in the West, it failed to provide a convincing account of religion's cross-cultural reality. Premised as it was on a unilinear view of cultural evolution, the model was unable to explain variation in ritual and ethics among societies that seemed, by other measures, to be at the same "stage" of social development. As anthropological research into small-scale societies intensified during the twentieth century, it became increasingly apparent that though some "primitives" were practical-minded and indifferent toward matters of religion others subscribed to richly elaborate and deeply ethical cosmologies (Douglas 1970; Evans-

Pritchard 1956; Horton 1967; Lienhardt 1961). This anthropological research succeeded in abolishing the myth of the monochrome primitive. In so doing it also cast doubt on unilinear models of religious evolution and the theory of conversion they sustained.

Impressive as it was, however, anthropology's antievolutionist critique left unresolved whether global patterns are evident in religious conversion or broad commonalities exist among the civilization-based faiths we call world religions. In the heady triumph of their critique social anthropologists preferred to describe particular societies in detail rather than address comparative concerns. They argued that before sustained historical or cross-cultural comparisons are possible we would need more comprehensive accounts of the range of human communities and the types of religion they support.

During the 1940s and 1950s, then, anthropology developed a richer understanding of small-scale societies than previously available and resisted efforts to reincorporate its insights into a comparative model of cultural development. Other disciplines and other schools within anthropology, however, were less reluctant to take on the topic of religious evolution. In the 1950s and early 1960s, in particular, social theory in the United States saw renewed interest in comparative history and social change. In part this was related to the postwar preoccupation with political-economic development, a concern given theoretical expression in the modernization theories of the era (Hoben and Hefner 1991). Scholars influenced by this approach were not at all averse to presenting their views on the role of religion in history, because, for them, the changing nature of religion illustrated general principles of social development.

WEBER AND WORLD RELIGION

Some of the most influential American social theorists of that postwar period—Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Clifford Geertz, and Robert Bellah, among others—looked to the German sociologist Max Weber for their understanding of the reality of religion and the forces for its change. Building on ideas of the nature of magic, science, and religion widespread in the late nineteenth century,[5] Weber had argued that the key feature distinguishing traditional and world religions was the superior rationalization of the latter (Weber 1956; Bendix 1977:87). Traditional religions are piecemeal in their approach to problems of meaning, he believed, but world religions formulate comprehensive responses to the ethical, emotional, and intellectual challenges of human life.

For Weber the ideal-typical representative of traditional religion was

the magician, and his portrayal of that role illustrates his view of the cultural divide between traditional and world-historical religions. Rather than develop a sustained ethical relationship with spiritual beings as, Weber believed, later prophetic religions do, the magician seeks to achieve a "coercive" and essentially mechanistic control over the supernatural. The spirit who is the object of such magical coercion, Weber suggested, is only weakly personified; he is more a force to be manipulated than a deity to be dignified with worship (Weber 1956:28, 44; cf. Whimster and Lash 1987:6). Such simpleminded magicality has serious consequences, Weber believed, because it requires little systematic reflection and inspires only "ad hoc" answers to problems of life's meaning (Weber 1956:38). In other words, as the American sociologist Talcott Parsons later put it, Weber saw traditional religion as overwhelmingly instrumental, wielded "in the interest of mundane, worldly concerns: health, long life, defeat of enemies, good relations with one's own people, and the like" (Parsons 1963:xxviii; cf. Bendix 1977:88; Weber 1946:277).

One of the most influential works in the sociology of religion during and after the 1960s is Robert Bellah's (1964) "Religious Evolution." Bellah drew heavily on Weber's insights to provide a comprehensive typology of religious change. Though he spoke of five stages in the development of religion (1964:361), Bellah's evolutionary sequence was still constructed around Weber's basic contrast between primitive and world religions. He observed, for example, that the former are more "compact" in their approach to problems of meaning (1964:359, 363–64). Citing Levy-Bruhl's (now discredited) model of the "primitive mentality,"[6] Bellah argued that traditional religions invade the self "to such an extent that the symbolizations of self and world are only very partially separate" (1964:373). In a similar fashion, he observed, the institutions of primitive religion are poorly differentiated from the rest of society. As a result they provide little intellectual leverage with which to evaluate or criticize received arrangements. In other words, primitive religions are so thoroughly this-worldly in orientation as to be incapable of challenging the status quo (1964:360). Providing little independent or rationalized doctrine, they are essentially conformist toward social conventions.

By contrast, Bellah believed, world religions present an entirely different social mien. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are all characterized by dualistic cosmologies of "world rejection" (Bellah 1964: 359, 366). Whatever their theological disagreements, these religions agree in proclaiming the existence of a transcendental realm vastly superior to that of everyday reality. In so doing they legitimate salvation quests designed to link humans to that higher realm. Like Weber, Bellah argued that the possibility of redemption is world-shaking in its consequences.

The recognition of a transcendent reality "dualizes" believers' cosmologies in such a way that, at least at times, the received world is evaluated in light of higher ideals and found wanting. Echoing a theme first developed by Weber (1956:58), Bellah observed that this transcendental tension creates pressures for societal reform. The result is nothing less than revolutionary: The mute traditionalism of primitive society, at least as Weber and Bellah saw it, is shattered. Driven by a redemptive vision, world religions have the capacity to remake the world rather than passively accept it.

Bellah's account was subtler than Weber's in its treatment of traditional religion and more balanced in its assessment of the varieties of modern religion. It nonetheless echoed Weber in its stark characterization of traditional society as unreflectively conformist and historic religion as an agent of dynamic reform. As a number of essays in the present volume demonstrate, recent historical and ethnographic research makes such a simple polarity hard to sustain. The model overlooks the tensions and developmental vitality internal to many traditional societies and the organic potentialities of local variants of world religions.[7] Kenelm Burridge (1969), for example, has demonstrated the widespread incidence of prophetic movements of redemptive renewal in Oceania. In a similar fashion Terence Ranger in this volume shows that traditional African religions were sometimes used to challenge extant hierarchies and promote reform rather than, as Bellah's model assumes, blindly legitimate the status quo. Though focused on quite different societies, the essays of David Jordan, Donald Pollock, and Aram Yengoyan in this volume provide similar evidence of the ability of traditional religions to challenge received lifeways and adapt to new social horizons.

Bellah also argued that, over time, religious ideas tend to evolve toward "more differentiated, comprehensive, and in Weber's sense, more rationalized formulations" (Bellah 1964:360). Here again, Bellah regarded rationalization as an event with dramatic consequences for the individual: "For the individual, the historic religions provide the possibility of personal thought and action independent of the traditional social nexus" (Bellah 1965:177). Echoing Emile Durkheim's ideas on mechanical solidarity, Bellah implied that by smothering independent reflection traditional religion impedes individual creativity. Loosening the grip of tradition on the individual, the world religions lay the foundation for human freedom.

In the 1960s and 1970s this vision of religious rationalization was popular in historical sociology and religious studies. More surprising, perhaps, given the cultural relativism that predominates in the field today, the model also had its adherents in American cultural anthropol-

ogy. There it was associated with no less a figure than Clifford Geertz.[8] Though he balked at embracing a fully evolutionary model and explicitly rejected any variant of unilinear evolutionism, Geertz (1973) described traditional and world religions in essentially the same terms as Bellah. He observed, for example, that the primary difference between traditional and world religions is that the former are organized around a "rigidly stereotyped . . . cluttered arsenal of myth and magic," but the latter "are more abstract, more logically coherent, and more generally phrased." In other words, world religions show "greater conceptual generalization, tighter formal integration, and a more explicit sense of doctrine" (Geertz 1973:171–72). Like Weber and Bellah before him Geertz held that the driving force behind world religions, and the source of their appeal for believers, was religious rationalization. A number of questions remained unresolved by Geertz, however, especially what rationalization means for believers and when and why it occurs.

PROPHECY AND TRANSCENDENCE

Even though they uniformly emphasize that rationalization is fundamental to world religions, scholars in the Weberian tradition disagree on what promotes such systematic cultural reformulation. Is rationalization primarily the product of a cognitive "break-through" (Parsons 1963:xxxiii), in which prophets, priests, or other influential intellectuals formulate new and more comprehensive answers to life's challenges? Can one speak, as some Weberians do, of whole Occidental, Asian, or Muslim rationalities, which permeate entire societies? Or does rationalization proceed unevenly or tentatively, more the consequence of environmental influences than of an underlying ethos or worldview?

No clear consensus on these issues has yet emerged among Weberian social theorists. The confusion that surrounds these topics goes back to Weber himself, who presented several different accounts of the historic causes of rationalization. Weber's early writings were influenced by the Hegelian ethos of late–nineteenth-century German social thought and held that rationalization was intrinsic to social development. As the German historian Wolfgang Mommsen has emphasized, Weber's view implied that social evolution was a "directional and irreversible process in which the principle of rationalization . . . triumphed out of inner necessity" (Mommsen 1987:38). Though consistent with nineteenth-century evolutionary ideas, this view says little about the social arrangements through which this putative principle is realized and substitutes a dubious thesis for a true sociology of knowledge.

In his mature writings, however, Weber pulled back from this ra-

tionalist vision of history in favor of a more conditional or circumstantial historiography, in which the social realization of religious (or other) values depends upon their formulation and implementation by different social "carriers." In this sense, as Parsons (1956:xxix) has emphasized, Weber's later writings portray rationalization as a complex process shaped by the interplay of material conditions, social groupings, and value commitments.

Weber's most sustained comments on this interplay appear in his *Economy and Society*, the most relevant portion of which for religious topics was translated into English as *The Sociology of Religion*. In this work Weber observes that a critical influence on the systematization and codification of the world religions was a "closing of their canon" early in their development. By this Weber means that a core body of scripture and dogma was enunciated and then elevated above the rest as sacred and inalterable. In explaining why this took place, Weber makes no reference to the teleological principles of his early work. Instead he cites three influences on the closing of the canon, all of which are related to the sociopolitical conditions in which world religions take shape.

The first cause of doctrinal canonization, Weber observes, is the "struggle between various competing groups and prophecies for the control of the community. Wherever such a struggle failed to occur or wherever it did not threaten the content of the tradition, the formal canonization of the scriptures took place very slowly" (Weber 1956:68). Here, then, Weber sees rationalization as the result of *intra*denominational contests to control doctrines implicated in the organization and leadership of a religious community. The process is motivated in the first instance not by some generalized cultural ethos but by a social contest between different status groups to win followers and institutionalize religious ideals.

A second influence, Weber remarks, is "the struggles of priests against indifference" (1956:71) among the laity. Here too Weber's discussion recognizes a complex interplay of circumstances and ideals in the rationalizing process. He recognizes, of course, that social action is influenced by both material and ideal interests and emphasizes that different status groups are disposed to different ethical styles (Bendix 1977:270). But he implies here that the struggle to promote orthodoxy among the laity may be motivated as much by the priests' desires to defend status privileges as by their commitment to the abstract truth of religious ideals.

Third, Weber writes that the elevation and codification of religious doctrines can occur through the efforts of religious communities to distinguish themselves from rivals. They do so to "make difficult the transference of membership to another denomination" (Weber 1956:71). In this instance, in other words, *inter*denominational competition for follow-

ers and, beyond that, for the realization of a certain ideal of human community provides an additional impetus for doctrinal rationalization.

In these, his most succinct comments on the social forces that promote doctrinal rationalization, Weber demonstrates that though he believed in the ability of religious ideas to motivate actors independently he by no means regarded religious rationalization as a self-actualizing historical principle. On the contrary, his explanation is much closer to what contemporary scholars sometimes refer to as a "political economy of meaning" (Eickelman 1979), which emphasizes the interplay of political rivalries, economic interests, and competing visions of moral community in the creation and reformation of cultural meanings.

In Weber's view, however, there was another, more critical dimension to rationalization, one that was less directly determined by the influences governing the closing of the canon. This was doctrinal revelation itself—that is, the initial creation, or revivalist reformulation, of religious truths by prophet-intellectuals working under charismatic inspiration (cf. Bendix 1977:258). Not surprisingly, Weber regarded revelation of doctrine as more idiosyncratic than the institutionalization of canon. The latter is a public process, he observed, shaped by clerical struggles and community rivalries. The revelation of canon, by contrast, depends strongly on the personal brilliance and visionary fervor of a charismatic prophet. As a result it is subject to social-psychological influences more obscure in their geneses than the forces involved in the closing of canon.

As numerous commentators have observed (Bendix 1977:89; Parsons 1963:xxxiii), this discussion of prophecy is one of the most interesting aspects of Weber's analysis of religious rationalization; it is also among the most problematic. It provides the analytic linchpin for his classification of religions into the two great categories of traditional and modern. The overall argument is, in fact, rather simple. The prophet is the voice of antitraditionalism. Since, for Weber traditionalism involves "unthinking acquiescence in customary ways" (Weber 1978:30), he presents the prophet as someone who repudiates custom and denounces the privileged class of religious specialists who have heretofore benefited from the unquestioning traditionalism of the masses. In place of blind conformity the prophet promulgates a higher and more deliberate religious ideal. His challenge is driven by new answers to the problems of meaning and new norms for the regulation of social life:

> Prophetic revelation involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be

> oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern. (Weber 1956:58)

In other words, the prophet is an intellectual who, as Weber says of all intellectuals, "transforms the concept of the world into the problem of meaning" (Weber 1956:125). He does so in a peculiarly comprehensive way, forging a system of meaning organized around "an ultimate and integrated value position" (Weber 1956:69). Then he demands that other people bring their lives into conformity with its urgent, world-building truth. Inasmuch as this value system rejects the world as given, it affirms a transcendent ideal, establishing new standards for the meaning and organization of life. In so doing it also denies the authority of traditional ways and becomes the clarion call for the redemptive transformation of the social world.

Whether this bold appeal is realized is, of course, an issue more complex than the phenomenon of prophetic rationalization alone. If it is to be successfully propagated, revelation has to be further clarified and systematized by a class of literate clerics, and the prophet's followers have to be transformed from a loosely organized charismatic community into a routinized church. But the basic point here is that Weber believed that where embraced by an effectively organized community of followers prophetic ideals can become a force for world transformation as powerful as any in human history. He emphasized this, clearly signaling his central disagreement with Karl Marx concerning the role of (socially organized) ideas in history.[9] The transcendental tension prophetic ideals create—between social reality as it is and as revelation insists it should be—is for Weber the prophet s crowning achievement. It is also the hallmark of the world religions and, ultimately, the source of their remarkable power to transform the world.

Several elements are notable in this account of religious rationalization. Weber's recognition of the role of intellectuals in religious change, first of all, is a useful corrective to the more romantically collective models of historical change typical of much social theory, especially that associated with the variants of Marxism and Durkheimism that influenced sociology and anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s. To this day Weberian sociology is distinguished by its recognition of the formative role of intellectuals in social change.

Weber's model has less felicitous aspects, however. First, as noted earlier, Weber's emphasis on prophecy overlooks the fact that prophets do arise in otherwise traditional societies (Burridge 1969; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Lienhardt 1961). Though, as I will suggest below, prophetic revelation in the world religions has a distinctive content and is subject to a

peculiar social management, the occurrence of prophecy and the aspiration for redemptive renewal are by no means confined to the world religions.

Another weakness of Weber's model of prophecy is that at times his portrayal emphasizes charisma so strongly that it implies that this personality trait is the real key to a prophet's success. As numerous scholars have observed (Bourdieu 1987; Burridge 1969), without a broader account of the intellectual and political circumstances in which the prophet's message takes shape this line of reasoning invites a naively heroistic explanation of historical change.[10] Studies of early Christianity (Kee 1980; MacMullen 1966) have consistently demonstrated that more prophecies were "available" prior to and during Jesus' life than were accepted and transformed into sustainable religious movements. The challenge for an interpretive history of prophecy and conversion, then, is to illuminate the broader circumstances that make a prophet's message compellingly real at a given time and place. This is to say that charisma must be understood relationally, with reference not only to the prophet's personality but also to the historical climate that disposes people to respond to it.

Clifford Geertz and Robert Bellah follow Weber in identifying doctrinal rationalization as the distinctive feature of the world religions (see Bellah 1964, 1965; Geertz 1973). Although Geertz shies away from overemphasizing the role of the charismatic prophet, nonetheless, like Weber, he attributes to intellectuals a central role in religious change. He observes, for example, that the "disenchantment" of traditional religion often results from intellectuals' success at suppressing belief in magic and local spirits (cf. Weber 1956:125). This creates a spiritual gap, Geertz says, because "the divine can no longer be apprehended *en passant* through the numberless concrete, almost reflexive ritual gestures strategically interspersed through the more general round of life" (Geertz 1973:174). By implication, to satisfy this spiritual need, people are thus drawn to more rationalized religious forms. This phenomenon, Geertz suggests, is occurring even today in many parts of the developing world.

RATIONALITY VERSUS RATIONALIZATION

What insights remain from the Weberian model of traditionalism and rationalization, and what are their implications for understanding conversion to world religions? In one sense historical and ethnographic studies confirm that most of the "successful" faiths we identify as world religions do tend to be more consistently rationalized than traditional ones—*if* we limit rationalization to mean the formal systematization and

codification of rite, doctrine, and authority. With their literate technologies, regularized clerisies, uniform rites, and sacred scriptures, world religions show a strong preoccupation with standardizing religious ideas and actions. But such generalizations about cultural form do not yet say much about its influence on the life-world or understanding of believers. Can we really be sure, for example, that for followers of the world religions "problems of meaning . . . get inclusive formulations and evoke comprehensive attitudes" (Geertz 1973:172)? On this point we must distinguish cultural rationalization—the enunciation, systematization, and formalization of cultural truths in light of a particular value or ideal, a quality of sociocultural *systems*—from the broader concept of rationality, or the effectiveness of certain ideas at making sense of an individual or group's life-world, again with reference to some underlying value complex.

Many religious scholars assume that a more or less unproblematic equivalence holds between cultural rationalization and experiential rationality at the level of the individual. Weber himself tended to speak this way, moving uncritically from the detail of religious doctrines to assumptions about their effective internalization by believers (see Bendix 1977:273–76). With such an approach it is easy to conclude that religions with more rationalized doctrines must also rationalize their believers' worldviews and behavior. But a well-established heritage in anthropology questions this unproblematic equivalence and the model of cultural internalization it implies. It disputes the automatic attribution of comprehensive rationality to the world religions and its denial to the traditional religions. For example, anthropologists as diverse as Bronislaw Malinowski (1948), E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1937), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), and Stanley J. Tambiah (1990) have succeeded in demonstrating that traditional modes of thought can be more flexible and systematic than Weberian characterizations of traditionalism would allow. Their studies and the work of others suggest that it is highly misleading to claim, as some Weberian sociologists still do, that traditional religions are "unable to go beyond the world as it is immediately experienced" (Whimster and Lash 1987:6).

In a similar vein, historical and ethnographic essays like those of Ranger, Jordan, and Yengoyan in this book have convincingly demonstrated that traditional religions are, in fact, quite diverse and often well differentiated from local social structures (see Shapiro 1987). Religious tradition need not be a timeless institution mechanically reproduced by unreflective adherents; at times it may be critically reformed and used to challenge social arrangements. The dynamic and potentially reflexive nature of "tradition" has been a recurring theme in the modern anthro-

pology of religion (Burridge 1969; de Craemer et al. 1976; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Hefner 1985; Lienhardt 1961). These studies suggest that the category of traditional religion, if it is to be useful at all, must not imply social organicism or uncritical conformism.

Anthropologists have raised a related point that further underscores the importance of distinguishing rationalization at the level of doctrine from life-world rationality at the level of the individual. Scholars have observed that the systematization and canonization of doctrine seen in world religions (or any other highly formalized system of knowledge, such as political ideology) can rigidify knowledge and impede the open inquiry that is the hallmark of genuine rational reflection (Bloch 1974; Gellner 1983:21; Goody 1986:8–22). In other words, whatever its internal rigor, the practical constraints that limit access to and utilization of religious canon may preclude its appropriation by believers in a coherence-enhancing, "rational" way (see also Bloch 1989; Harris and Heelas 1979; Hefner 1985).

Similarly, the doctrines and meanings formalized in religious canons may, in fact, have little to do with believers' motives for embracing them. This appears to have been the case, for example, among Merrill's Tarahumara and Yengoyan's Aboriginal Australians. Both at times endorsed elements of Christian cosmology, but they did so more for reasons of protection and access to resources than from intellectual commitment. All this makes the putative rationality of religious doctrine a shaky ground on which to build a theory of world religions or a general model of conversion. In an early essay Robert Bellah attempted to speak to this problem, arguing that canonization need not undermine the rationalizing effect of cultural knowledge:

> Of course, it is also true that, in every case, the great systematizers and commentators themselves came to be accepted as final and unchallengeable authorities, and in this way inhibited further cultural rationalization. And indeed some of them may be viewed as sanctified cultural dead ends. But unless we are to buy the specious argument that Aristotle, for example, simply because he was often blindly followed, did not himself make any important contribution to the development of cultural capacity in the West, then the significance of the great religious thinkers should not be minimized. (Bellah 1965:1809)

Bellah's argument overlooks some of Weber's earlier insights into the closing of the canon, specifically the importance of understanding rationalization in relation to doctrinal canons *and* the sociopolitical institutions through which they are propagated. From this sociology-of-knowledge perspective it is clear that the arrangements through which

Aristotle's truths were elevated to prominence in Western culture were quite different from those that canonized Christian doctrines. The cultural products may look similar, inasmuch as both bodies of knowledge came to occupy prestigious positions in Western culture. But Aristotle's truths were never sanctified as dogma, defended by vigilant clerics, or imposed through the brutalizing of heretics, as was at times the case with Christian dogma. The social regime that supported each truth system was different and so too was the impact of each on rational inquiry. Thus we must be careful not to equate the formal systematization seen in religious doctrines, that is, "rationalization," with the coherent reordering of cognition and action at the level of the individual, or enhanced "rationality." Clearly, the possibility of a powerful linkage of public doctrine and personal experience exists, and where this potential is realized religion can have a profound effect on believers' worldviews.

Contrary to some psychological accounts of conversion (James 1982; Nock 1933), however, we must *not* assume that such a deeply systematic rationalization is necessary or intrinsic to religious conversion. To make such an assumption is to project an interiorist bias onto a phenomenon that comes in a wide array of psychocultural forms. The essays in this volume illustrate the variability of the phenomenology of conversion. On their evidence interpretations of conversion must begin by acknowledging its experiential variation and then go on to explore its genesis in different social and intellectual milieus.

Such a comparative exercise yields one additional insight. The most necessary feature of religious conversion, it turns out, is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true. In other words, at the very least—an analytic minimum—conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity. To draw on terms from David Jordan's essay, conversion is a matter of belief and social structure, of faith and affiliation. More particularly, as William Merrill and Charles Keyes emphasize, conversion need not reformulate one's understanding of the ultimate conditions of existence, but it always involves commitment to a new kind of moral authority and a new or reconceptualized social identity.

Whether with the new beliefs to which they say they subscribe, individuals or groups actually go on to rationalize their experience is a more complex question. Is the religious community organized so that believers have access to sacred doctrines, or is a detailed understanding of their truth restricted to clerical specialists? If there is public access, or if

popularized variants of high doctrines are readily available, are there cultural media that promote this religious knowledge so that it becomes an integral force in people's lives? Finally, do believers interpret and apply the rationalized doctrines in ways consistent with their formal truth? Anthropological studies (Badone 1990; Farriss 1984; Hefner 1985; Schneider and Lindenbaum 1987) have repeatedly demonstrated that certain religions can work well enough without a comprehensive correspondence between high doctrine and popular belief. Alternately, a religion's central doctrines may remain latent for long periods, only to be taken up when conditions favor their revivalist application to new historical circumstances. In modern times the egalitarian appeal of both scripturalist Islam and evangelical Christianity provides telling examples of just such a process of doctrinal rediscovery (Gellner 1981; Martin 1990; Munson 1988).

We know too that some individuals engage the truths of their religion only long after their general identification with the tenets of the faith. In a certain sense, as I suggest in my case study in this collection, religious conversion always involves such authoritative acceptance of as yet unknown or unknowable truths.

RELIGIOUS REGIMES

Casual references to rationalization thus hide what are, in fact, several different processes, each subject to different organizations and controls. Religious rationalization includes (1) the creation and clarification of doctrines by intellectual systematizers, (2) the canonization and institutionalization of these doctrines by certain social carriers, and (3) the effective socialization of these cultural principles into the ideas and actions of believers. In addition, doctrines may not always be directly appropriated by believers but may be made indirectly available to them, usually through a clerisy-supported scriptural or ritual tradition, as a familiar and readily accessible reservoir of meanings to be drawn upon in moments of personal or social crisis.

This more complex understanding of rationalization encourages us to recognize the pluralistic nature of religious knowledge and culture itself. No cultural tradition is "the undivided property of the whole society" (Bourdieu 1977:73), and the relation of an individual to his or her culture is never simply a matter of internalizing prefigured truths (Bloch 1989; Hefner 1985; Schwartz 1978). Rationalization may occur in one religious sphere without occurring in all others. It may display its effects unevenly: for example, church doctrines may become the esoteric concern of a clerical elite or, as with Keyes's new Buddhists, new converts may have not

yet learned all there is to know about the faith. Alternately, religious dogmas may be applied in ways that have little to do with their formal truth. This happened, for example, when the Spanish crown used Catholic doctrines to justify policies designed to transform people in northern Mexico into a docile labor force (see Merrill's essay). These and other examples show that it is misleading to assume that the formal truths embedded in religious doctrines directly reflect or inform believers' ideas or actions.

Having qualified it so thoroughly, what have we left of Weber's model of the rationality of world religions? The answer, I believe, is that the heart of his analysis still provides a powerful insight. As Weber claimed, the doctrines of the world religions (or, again, their most successful institutional carriers) *do* seem to be organized around a unified view of the world derived from a consciously systematized attitude toward life. And these same dogmas do tend to agree in demanding that men and women conduct themselves according to this unified and significant pattern. This thesis goes too far if it is interpreted to mean that such doctrinal systematization is sufficient to guarantee the rationality of all believers' worldviews. It also errs if it implies that traditional religions lack all such systematization, or if it is used to assert that religious tradition involves unquestioning conformity to received social ways (cf. Burridge 1969; Hefner 1985; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Laitin 1986).[11]

Weber's views on the world religions retain keener insight, however, on one important point: the severity of the transcendentalism he correctly identifies at the core of their doctrines. It is not just that the doctrines of these religions put a greater distance between the mundane and spiritual worlds or that they "reject this world" by redefining it in relation to another. At least in doctrinal principle they do all this—but then so do a number of religions that have shown markedly less success at winning followers. The real force of the world religions lies in their linkage of these strict transcendental imperatives to institutions for the propagation and control of religious knowledge and identity over time and space.

In other words, the most distinctive feature of the world religions or of, again, their most institutionally successful variants is something both doctrinal and social-organizational. These religions regularize clerical roles, standardize ritual, formalize doctrine, and otherwise work to create an authoritative culture and cohesive religious structure. At times this cultural impetus may be subverted or challenged, giving rise to heterodox or localized variants of the faith that challenge its transregional integrity. Such a process seems to have regularly occurred, for example, in Sufi and folk variants of Islam, in Gnostic and folk Christianity, and, as Keyes's essay aptly illustrates, in popular Theravāda Buddhism. In instances

such as these it may not be useful to identify localized or sectarian variants of the faith as world religions at all, except in a loose genealogical sense. This implies, of course, that the concept of world religion suffers from much of the same analytic overextension as does that of traditional religion. Not all of the communities said to be part of a world religion really partake of the world-building qualities mentioned above. But the schisms, localization, and segmentation that take place in world religions only illustrate the remarkable achievement of those communities that can sustain their faith and knowledge over time and space.

The development of institutions capable of standardizing knowledge and identity across history and culture has allowed the religions we know as world faiths to take advantage of the conditions that have accompanied the emergence of multiethnic, state-based societies. Indeed, from this perspective the world religions appear to be complex responses to the challenge of identity and moral community in a plural world. In such a context, the world religions' message of a Truth and a redemptive identity incumbent upon all people and their introduction of a social organization for the propagation of that message have proved to be revolutionary forces in their own right, well suited to the challenge of life in a new kind of social macrocosm.

FROM MICROCOSM TO MACROCOSM

The debate sparked by Robin Horton's stimulating essays (1971, 1975a, 1975b) on African conversion provides an alternative vantage point for evaluating the rationality of religion and the forces promoting conversion to world religions. While preserving Weber's emphasis on meaning as the key to religious change, Horton insists that traditional religions are not necessarily less rational than world religions, just narrower in focus. The difference, he implies, is quantitative rather than qualitative, a matter of scope or range, not superior rationalization per se. Rather than address topics of universal relevance, traditional religions concentrate on a smaller, more local array of problems. This is not surprising, Horton remarks, because people in traditional societies live in smaller, more territorially restricted communities. The spirits most commonly invoked in traditional religions—ancestors, territorial guardians, nature spirits —are similarly drawn from familiar terrains. This does not mean that traditional beliefs are either irrational or even less rational than more encompassing canons. They can be entirely rational in relation to the circumstances they engage. Indeed, in a restricted social context the more universalistic dogmas of the world religions might well be meaningless.

Horton cites numerous African studies that indicate, contra Weber,

that the multiplicity of spirits in traditional religions does not indicate intellectual opportunism or deep-seated irrationality. "The spiritual beings of the traditional cosmologies are generally thought of as operating in a more or less regular manner, and [the] multiplicity of spiritual agencies is by no means synonymous with confusion, inconsistency, or incoherence" (Horton 1971:99).

Horton also observes that most peoples in sub-Saharan Africa already had a concept of a supreme deity before their contact with Christianity or Islam. He explains that their religious cosmologies often had two tiers, a lower level of local spirits and a higher one of a supreme god or gods. The lesser spirits were "in the main concerned with the affairs of the local community and environment—i.e., with the microcosm," and the supreme being was "concerned with the world as a whole—i.e., with the macrocosm" (Horton 1971:101). In the premodern era most people lived "within the microcosm of the local community . . . to a considerable extent insulated from the macrocosm of the wider world" (Horton 1971:101). As a result their religious ideas focused on lesser spirits, and they devoted only marginal attention to the cult of the supreme being.

Horton's model can be faulted for overemphasizing the boundedness of traditional communities. In this volume, Yengoyan, Jordan, Pollock, and Ranger demonstrate the error of automatically identifying traditional religions with closed, microcosmic worlds. Much as Kopytoff (1987) has argued for African institutions in general, Ranger shows that in premodern Africa many religions were not uniquely microcosmic but bridged ethnic and territorial boundaries. Criticizing our myth of "secure corporate identities" grounded on "immobilized societies," he notes that even before colonial times southern Africans in different locales drew on a common pool of mythic symbols and were widely involved in transregional cults. Jordan's essay on Chinese religion in this volume brilliantly demonstrates a similar truth.[12]

Horton's model, then, conflates two concepts that are better kept distinct: the contrast between traditional and world religions and that between localized and transregional religions. In reality these contrasts need not neatly overlap. As the essays by Kee, Ranger, Barker, Merrill, and Pollock illustrate, the tension between the local and global can be played out within both indigenous and world religions (see also Badone 1990; Eickelman 1982; Schneider and Lindenbaum 1987).

This much said, Horton's model retains much relevance for our clarification of the phenomenon of conversion and, in particular, Christianization. It quite properly draws our attention to how incorporation into a larger social order acts as a catalyst for both conversion and the reformulation of indigenous religion. Horton is right to emphasize that

this event is a powerful impetus for the reconstruction of religion. As long as we do not assume that traditional religion knows nothing of such broader involvements, the model is useful and provides another perspective on the sociology of religious change.

Having emphasized that an individual's or community's involvement in the macrocosm will influence the choice of cosmology, Horton concludes that it is the dissolution of microcosmic boundaries that propels people toward more universalistic doctrines. Conversely, those who remain within microcosmic worlds are more likely to devote their attention to lesser spirits and more restricted religious idioms. This leads Horton to a startling conclusion. Even in the absence of Christianity or Islam, he asserts, most African peoples would have developed a cult of the supreme being and a more overarching cosmology as they made their way into the "macrocosm" (Horton 1971:102–3). Drawing again on Ranger's revisionist reading of the African data, we could add here that in precontact times many Africans had apparently already begun to do just that.

Horton's argument challenges conventional analyses of conversion. For Horton the "crucial" variables affecting religious change among indigenous peoples "are not the external influences (Islam, Christianity) but the pre-existing thought-patterns and values, and the pre-existing socioeconomic matrix" (Horton 1975a:221). In other words, "acceptance of Islam and Christianity is due as much to the development of the traditional cosmology in response to other features of the modern situation as it is to the activities of missionaries" (Horton 1971:103). Religious change is first and foremost "dictated by the postulates of the 'basic' cosmology" and the "dissolution of microcosmic boundaries" (Horton 1975b:381). Islam and Christianity, then, are little more than "catalysts—stimulators and accelerators of changes which were 'in the air' anyway" (Horton 1971:104).[13]

POLITICS AND INTELLECTUALISM

At first many scholars welcomed Horton's analysis of conversion because it portrayed Africans as active players in religious change rather than as passive consumers or victims. The model also challenges the Weberian characterization of traditional religions as intellectually piecemeal or nonrational, replacing it with what we might call an ecological appreciation of their logic. Horton's model is flawed, however, by several shortcomings in addition to those mentioned above.

The most vexing aspect of Horton's model is its neglect of political and structural influences on conversion. Originally, Horton referred to his model as a "thought experiment" in which he invited us to reflect on the

likely course of religious change in a hypothetical Africa to which Islam and Christianity had never come, but into which political and economic institutions of increasing social scope were introduced. In his subsequent discussion, however, Horton unwittingly transformed this imaginative exercise into a hidden analytic premise. One can argue, as he does, that a shift to the higher end of the cosmological spectrum would have occurred even in the absence of Islam and Christianity. But one cannot logically conclude from this that the institutions of Islam and Christianity were insignificant in the cosmological changes that actually took place. Influences other than intellectualist ones were at work in the transformation of native cosmologies. Horton may be right to insist, then, that Africans exposed to the macrocosm would have adjusted their cosmological horizons even without the catalyst of Christianity or Islam. We must add, however, that the timing and content of actual change were profoundly affected by the European presence and the crisis of identity and authority that presence provoked.

Jean Comaroff (1985), Humphrey Fisher (1973), and Caroline Ifeka-Moller (1974:59) all criticize Horton on this point. They show that many African societies were incorporated into broader polities without developing the monolatrous (single-divinity-focused) emphasis that Horton predicts. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh (1987:26) observes that the more common indigenous response has been not monolatry or monotheism but the incorporation of new forms of worship into an already existing pantheon. Nancy Farriss (1984:302) and William Merrill (this volume) note the same tendency in the Maya and Tarahumara religions of Mesoamerica before and after the Spanish conquest. David Jordan's essay demonstrates that a similarly inclusive, "additive" quality has long characterized traditional Chinese religion—and is a reason why Christian exclusivity has not been well received by Chinese (see also Fried 1987:102).

Fisher (1985:165) underscores the broader issue here: "One fundamental novelty introduced, in the long run, by Islam [and Christianity] has been the idea of an exclusive religious allegiance." For this and other reasons, he argues, Islam and Christianity are more than catalysts for changes "already in the air." Once implanted in local environments, they create a "juggernaut" that "advances under its own momentum" (Fisher 1985:153) rather than, as Horton would have it, under the dictates of indigenous cosmology.

For students of religious conversion the challenge in this controversy is to strike a balance between the two extremes of intellectualist voluntarism and structural determinism. Even if politically imbalanced, conversion encounters are always two-sided, and the social and intellectual dynamics of each camp affect the outcome. Rather than overemphasize

intrinsic or extrinsic variables in conversion, then, we should explore the way in which the two interact and expect that the relative importance of each may vary in different settings. Such an approach would clarify why some indigenous peoples eagerly embrace Christianity (Barker's Maisin, Kee's early Christians, as well as numerous examples from Oceania, see White 1988; Boutilier et al. 1978), but others tend to appropriate its meanings selectively (Tarahumara, Aboriginal Australia, Taiwan) or reject them outright (Amazon, Thailand).

This same insight is related to the earlier discussion of religious rationalization. As Weber argued, the intellectual formulation of doctrines is just one element in their effective institutionalization. Another is the development of authoritative organizations for the propagation and control of religious knowledge and identity: here traditional religions are often at a severe disadvantage relative to their world-religious rivals. As Jack Goody (1986; cf. Tapp 1989) has noted, many traditional religions are illiterate and thereby encounter serious technical obstacles to the codification and dissemination of their doctrines. Equally important, these religions often lack institutions for coordinating membership and authority over large social expanses. By contrast, their rivals can be characterized as "world" religions precisely because—even if locally they are deeply embedded in parochial social arrangements (see, e.g., Badone 1990)—they have developed something that the other type of religious community lacks: transregional organizations for the indoctrination of the faith and the regularization of community.

Not coincidentally, these same world religions sometimes accompany political agents with their own designs on local lives and resources. Whether government policies explicitly support missionizing (as in the examples from colonial New Guinea, Mesoamerica, and Brazil in this book) or provide no such direct assistance (as in colonial Java,[14] modern Australia, and Thailand), the impact of foreign expansion may severely challenge indigenous social structures and the religious identities they sustain. Even in the absence of missionary initiatives, therefore, social dislocation may encourage people to look elsewhere than the canons of tradition for an understanding of who they are and how they should live (cf. White 1988).

The neglect of politics and sociological features in religious conversion justifies, then, criticisms that approaches like Horton's are, as I. M. Lewis (1980:vii–viii) has put it, too "mentalistic" and thus unable to recognize how religions like Christianity and Islam provide "an identity as well as a religious faith" and a "set of rules for life" in addition to instruments for the intellectual control of space-time events. Recognition

of the broader influences at work in conversion encounters, however, need not imply repudiation of Horton's admirable effort to see religious change, as he puts it, through believers' eyes. The changing social environment in which conversion so often unfolds is not simply a product of material forces. Its effects register not only in actors' material well-being but also in their sense of self-worth and community and in their efforts to create institutions for the sustenance of both. This problem of dignity and self-identification in a pluralized and politically imbalanced world lies at the heart of many conversion histories.

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

We can now see that conversion is related to a process of identity development often referred to as "reference group" formation. Bridging social psychology and the sociology of knowledge, reference group theory emphasizes that self-identification is implicated in all choice, in all matters of self-interest, and in the myriad conflicts and solidarities of human life (Merton 1968; Sherif and Sherif 1969; Shweder et al. 1987; Hefner 1990).[15] More specifically, reference group theory stresses that in the course of their lives individuals develop a real or imagined reference group—an anchor for their sense of self and other and for the entitlements and obligations thought to characterize relationships—and refer to that reference group when evaluating people, situations, and life projects. As the philosopher Lawrence Blum (1987:331) has observed, such a viewpoint challenges the "too-sharp separation between self and other" characteristic of utilitarian models of the human actor; it emphasizes instead that "our connection to others and our capacities for responsiveness are a central part of our identities, rather than being mere sentiments or voluntary commitments." Acknowledging this powerful truth, we are thus challenged in all social inquiry to explore how societies affect the development of personal identity and commitments and to compare how different social orders influence the foundation of personal morality (cf. Douglas 1970).

Though sometimes described as unitary, actors' reference group orientations can actually be plural or contradictory. One's ethnic allegiances, for example, may at some point conflict with those of nation, race, gender, religion, political affiliation, or any other of the host of allegiances available for self-identification in a plural society. Much of the poignancy of life in a modern society originates in that sobering fact, which suggests a practical as well as a moral dimension to the dynamic of self-identification. It may be only in the course of quotidian life, with its

ongoing commitments, pain, and rewards, that the entailments of one allegiance quite unexpectedly contradict those of another, forcing reflection on what one values in others and what of oneself one holds dear.

The dynamic of reference group orientation involves an ongoing, "reflexive monitoring" (Giddens 1984:6) of one's self-image and goals in social action. Though one's identity *is* abstract and deeply psychological, it is not *just* an abstraction held in some inaccessible psychological reserve. One's self-identification is implicated in all social interactions. Events in the world, new opportunities and dilemmas, feed back on this guiding sensibility, forcing adjustments to one's image of self and other. Social groups are themselves shaped by this economy of values and commitment. Personal commitments are in turn influenced by the ability of different social groupings to inspire or enforce allegiance to their ideals of self, status, and community.

By training our attention on this moral economy of self-identification, reference group theory encourages us to recognize that human identity is not innate or wholly socially determined but develops from ongoing and deeply contingent social-psychological interactions. Self-identification must be at the heart of our efforts to understand individual life-worlds and the creative agency of human beings. Though culture is implicated in the creation of self, its precise effects are mediated by the dispositions of the individuals it engages, their positions in a particular social world, and their ongoing efforts—never themselves fully culturally programmed—to assess the meaning and value of all that goes on around them. Little of this interaction can be reduced to the status of sociological fact or considered the passive internalization of cultural symbols, religious or otherwise.

One important insight follows from this more dynamic view of human development. Contrary to many approaches in the social sciences, reference group theory denies that we can assume that an individual's membership group—the world he or she inhabits day to day—is always the source for reference group identification (Merton 1968; Hefner 1990). Not everyone need subscribe to the canons of his or her community. Alienation occurs even in small-scale societies. Some individuals retreat to personal fantasies or, where intercultural contacts allow, look elsewhere than to their community of origin for alternative notions of self and self-worth.[16]

This last point is important in understanding the logic of religious change in intercultural encounters. As a society is thrust, sometimes against its members' wills, into a larger or reorganized macrocosm, new lifestyles and ethical options appear. Missionaries or other proselytizers may lead in this challenge to tradition (Beidelman 1982; Burridge 1978;

Farriss 1984). But even in their absence the threat to received ways may be severe. As a society is brought into contact with a larger politico-economic order, institutions once vital for the sustenance of indigenous identities may be abolished or subverted, bringing new circuits of status, investment, and self-validation into existence (Comaroff 1985; Hefner 1985; Volkman 1985). In such a context a religion that promises a new measure of dignity and access to the values and rewards of the larger society may find a ready following among peoples previously committed to local ways. As Kenelm Burridge (1969:133) has observed of millenarian movements, this crisis of self-identification is as much moral as it is material, because "the politico-economic conflict . . . is also a conflict between two different kinds of prestige system," two different ways of affirming human value.

If their lifeways are to survive, an indigenous people will need to maintain institutions capable of inspiring or imposing a sense of identification with those ways. This too is as much a political as a moral achievement, and it may be especially difficult in the face of powerfully intrusive polities or mission proselytizers promoting ideas that deny the truth of local ways. Where, as among Keyes's Thai, Pollock's Culina, or Jordan's Taiwanese, however, the institutions that support indigenous solidarities remain resilient, or where missionizing is not intensive or sustained (Brown and Bick 1987; Wedenoja 1988), the effective appeal of the incoming religion may be quite limited. Alternately, where a tribal minority is threatened with cultural extinction at the hands of fast-encroaching neighbors, it may adopt a world religion other than that of its proximate rivals, maintaining its larger ethnic identity by giving up its traditional religion (see Keyes and Pollock below and Kammerer 1990; Stearman 1987; Tapp 1989). The survival of local lifeways depends on how or to what extent people can integrate their indigenous institutions into a now more inclusive social world.

What all this means is that our accounts of conversion must be "multicausal rather than mono-causal," as Emefie Ikenga-Metuh (1987:25) has put it. But we must recognize that multicausality is itself a consequence of a more general fact, widely recognized in contemporary social theory (see Berger 1967; Bourdieu 1977; Comaroff 1985; Eickelman 1985; Giddens 1984; Hefner 1985). As a social phenomenon religion is, to use Anthony Giddens's phrase, "dually constructed"—emerging both from the ideas and intentions of individuals and from the institutions and circumstances that constrain and routinize the world in which people act, often outside their full awareness.

This simple insight into what Peter Berger (1967:4) once called the "dialectic process of world building" is a useful reminder of a meth-

odological issue raised again and again by the essays in this volume. Accounts of conversion that emphasize its putative psychological reality —such as the classic essays by Nock (1933) and James (1982) or a surprising number of studies in contemporary American sociology (Snow and Machalek 1984)—remain incomplete if they neglect the broader context that informs the self- and situational-evaluation of the converted. Politics and social ethics are *intrinsic* to the psychocultural reality of conversion, informing an agent's commitment to an identity and the moral authority that commitment implies. From this perspective, rather than oppose psychological models of conversion against sociopolitical ones, we should insist on and explore their interpenetration.

FROM BABBLE TO WORD

The incorporation of indigenous communities into a new or larger macrocosm, then, has been one of the most pervasive supports for conversion to world religions thoughout human history. This is not to imply, of course, that the politico-moral crises that accompany incorporation are *always* the catalysts for conversion. Sometimes they may be of little import, as, for example, when an individual in Taiwan (see Jordan's essay), northern Thailand (see Keyes's), Central Australia (see Yengoyan's), or northern Mexico (see Merrill's) converts to a new faith because it provides better relief from affliction than traditional therapies did. Nonetheless, the incorporation of small-scale societies into new or more expansive polities has been a powerful, though by no means unilinear, current of world history since ancient times. As the Yengoyan and Merrill essays demonstrate, some traditional religions may dig in, reorganize, and survive this integrative revolution. But the world religions often enjoy a competitive advantage over their rivals in that they are ideologically and organizationally preadapted to the macrocosm. Catalysts of moral crisis, they stand ready to provide, or impose, prefigured ideals for a posttraditional world.

All the world religions emerged after the formation of the supraethnic, state-based societies we identify with civilization. Weber (1956:48) notes this fact when he says that both the world religions and prophecy had something to do with the spread of the great world empires. Having originated *in* empire, however, the world religions have not always been religions *of* empire. Sometimes, of course, they directly supported imperial policies. In fact, however, attitudes toward state power vary among the world religions and even within the same religion, as Howard Kee shows in his study of early Christianity. The essays by Merrill, Barker, Pollock, Yengoyan, and Hefner make a similar point, showing that in

modern times the relationship between Christian missionaries and state authorities has varied widely (see also Beidelman 1982; Huber 1987; Kipp 1990).

Whatever their relationship to official power, the world religions arrive with the most remarkable of appeals. They proclaim a Truth that stands above others and assert that its recognition is essential for a meaningful life. Their redemptive message seeks to relativize the taken-for-granted status of traditional ways and may create great excitement or confusion. The message may be used to justify attacks on received social values and their elite custodians. It may also be used to mandate conformity to new rituals and to establish circuits of value and investment different from those of the previous social regime. In so doing the message may also create new opportunities for social mobility and prestige. Where, as among outcastes in modern India (Forrester 1977) or women in the early Jesus movement (Kee 1989:92) and some areas of the developing world (Bond 1987:64), the new religion opens opportunities to individuals previously excluded from prestigious positions, it may bring about important changes in gender roles, class, and status.

Such influences may be especially effective when the Word is proclaimed at the same time that politics, commerce, and communications force or allow growing numbers of people into a larger or reorganized macrocosm, deepening the crisis of received social ways. Burdened with a sense of oppression and powerlessness, an indigenous people may by themselves come to feel that they are in need of, and moving toward, social redemption, that is, a state that provides relief from an intolerable situation through new morality and social relations. In some cases their efforts at revitalization may be millenarian, drawing on only partially detraditionalized idioms (Burridge 1969). Where native society is already in disarray or where its cosmology is more malleable (cf. Sahlins 1985, White 1988:11), however, Christianity or other exogeneous religions may present an appealingly ready-made formula for a revitalized social community.

Through a conceptual legerdemain that is their hallmark, world religions respond to this crisis of tradition in a most unusual way. They declare their rejection of human community in its everyday form. The new life they promise is not just of this world, they say, but based on a transcendent truth and divinity. In practice, of course, this message of salvation may attract less attention than the practical benefits of membership in the new religious community. This may be especially true where traditional religion is associated with the collapsing structures of local society and the new faith is perceived to be tied to a larger and more bountiful political economy (see Comaroff 1985; Hefner 1987). From this

perspective the message of radical "world rejection" may in fact carry less weight than the new religion's perceived worldly benefits.

But the intellectual logic of the world religions is not reducible to a broader economic struggle. The world religions *do* have distinctive cosmologies, the logic of which is best illustrated in their attitudes toward the traditional cults they seek to abolish or subsume. The hallmark of the world religions—or, again, of their most successfully institutionalized core variants—is their subordination of local spirits, dialects, customs, and territory to a higher spiritual cosmology. They declare the superiority of God or gods over low spirits, scriptural Word over local babble, transregional clerics over local curers, and a Holy Land or lands over local territory (Hefner 1987). Their world rejection, then, is of worldly consequence. It relativizes everyday reality by proclaiming that the new religion stands above local custom or community. For at least some believers, as Weber stated, this claim creates a passionate imperative for the reevaluation of local ways.

But the success of a world religion may also present it with a dilemma. The transregional community it creates cannot assume the same depth of shared experience as local faiths, nor the same intimate mechanisms of social control. Left to itself the Word dissolves into local babble, jeopardizing its urgent truth. The most successful variants of the world religions, however, seem adapted to meet just this challenge. They support institutions for the dissemination and standardization of sacred truths. Alongside their scripture and high doctrines they develop simplified rites and beliefs, neatly packaged for mass consumption. Not coincidentally, this standardized material also provides an accessible body of symbolism for the creation of a broadly cast religious identity.

The perceived need to stave off babble and disseminate the Word in an enduring fashion also inspires prophets and clerical intellectuals to emphasize ecumenical unity and develop doctrines that are "more abstract, more logically coherent, and more generally phrased" (Geertz 1973:172). Specifically, the universalization in the doctrines of the world religions is motivated not just by the search for more "comprehensive answers to problems of meaning," as conventional Weberian accounts would have it, but also by the interest of religious intellectuals in assisting the elaboration and regularization of the faith.[17] In so doing, as Weber observed, these clerics also help to legitimate the community to which their own status and identity are tied.

From a sociology-of-knowledge perspective all these arrangements testify to the emergence of a new kind of religion, characterized by a powerful organization for shaping ethics, knowledge, and identity. Originating as it did in a crisis of multicultural community, the regimen is uniquely

adapted to the world-building possibilities of the civilized macrocosm and the problems of identity and moral differentiation at its core.

THE CHRISTIAN MACROCOSM

Born in a plural social milieu, each of the world religions has survived by responding effectively to three issues: defining the boundaries and membership of religious community; establishing the relationship of religion to political power; and controlling belief among a laity ignorant of or uninterested in official doctrine. What is unique about Christianity's response to these problems?

As Howard Kee (1980, 1989, and this volume) observes, Christianity originated in an era in which Roman conquest had generalized a sense of marginality and forced detraditionalism among the peoples of the Mediterranean. Rome did so without managing to win most of these people to the high Hellenistic culture it sought to promote (Kee 1980:75). The empire, then, was an unusually effective catalyst of macrocosmic crisis. In the years before Christ's mission the Roman cults had fallen into decline, and new cults of oriental divinities found "appeal across barriers of family, ethnic origin, and social status" and "aroused the hopes of the alienated as well as the privileged" (Kee 1980:84). The shift toward a higher cosmology was already in the air.

In this uneasy macrocosm a movement emerged proclaiming a new interpretation of the Jewish covenant. Paul—apostle of the macrocosmic universe par excellence—above all committed himself to the formulation of a more inclusive concept of the covenant. New Testament accounts show Jesus making vague pronouncements on the issue; Peter, similarly, seems to have been uncertain about the precise nature of the covenant revision. After Christ's death there were several Christian communities other than the "structured city congregations" which recognized Paul's authority (Kee 1980:94). Over the long run, however, Paul's vision won out, defining the covenant inclusively, so that it spanned a broad range of social and ethnic strata.

With its initially urban, mobile, and multiethnic social base, early Christianity was little inclined to emphasize traditional forms of kinship or ascribed social status. Jesus is said to have appealed to his followers to commit themselves to the family of God rather than to the social and biological family. Though, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, Christianity can be adjusted to a variety of social and kinship organizations, its scripture can and has been used to promote the simplification of kinship relations and even the individualization of social ties. Weber (1956) and, in a recent essay, Jane Schneider (1990) have argued that

such an individualizing message gave Christianity an elective affinity with one of the modern era's key structural dispositions, social individualization. Drawing on Burridge's (1978) account of Christian individualism, Yengoyan illustrates the converse. Where, as among Central Australian peoples, the autonomy of the individual is downplayed in favor of a view of the actor as socially embedded, the Christian message may seem unappealingly foreign or subversive of extant social relations (cf., for China, Fried 1987:103). Where that same social order is in decline, however, the individualism of the Christian message may be powerfully appealing, legitimating nonconformism and the organization of new forms of social relationship (cf. Martin 1990; White 1988).

Having emerged in a state-based society, Christianity, like all the world religions, was also obliged to develop a policy toward the powers that be. Here again the New Testament writers display quite varied attitudes. With his apocalyptic view of history Mark was inclined to urge "noninvolvement, in view of the expectation that all worldly powers were soon to be brought to an end by direct divine action." In contrast, Paul took the view that "the mission could be fulfilled only if political and civil order were maintained throughout the empire" (Kee 1980:120).

Even in early times, then, Christian policies on church-state relations were considerably more varied than the familiar "give-unto-Caesar" image would suggest. Despite this variability, however, Christianity's carriers have shown a general tendency toward what Ernest Gellner (1981:2) has called "political modesty." Even when, as during the European Middle Ages, church and state were interwoven, the clergy hesitated to formulate a systematic politico-legal corpus. The legacy of Christ and Paul's segregation of religious and political realms, as recorded in scripture, haunted Christian scholarship.

In this respect, of course, Christianity differs markedly from the core tradition within Islam. Within this mainline tradition, Islam can be interpreted to make a more sustained claim to power. Its scriptures and commentaries provide an explicit, if still incomplete, program for what is to be done once power is won. In this, as Gellner (1981:5) has noted, one sees the difference between Christian and Muslim origins. Christianity originated at the margins of empire, indeed, originally at the margins of Judaism; Islam arose at the heart of an expansionist imperium. Reacting against the "legalistic erudition" of Pharisaic Judaism (Weber 1956:131, 270), early Christianity seemed little inclined to enunciate policies for the management of an empire to which, some time later, it would become a reluctant heir. Drawn into empire, eventually its clerical officers did help to develop the bureaucratic and legalistic machinery required for congregational management and political rule. But at its scriptural core

remained the message of its origins, proclaiming itself for the poor in spirit. Here too was a latent reservoir of meaning to be revived by later generations of Christian evangelicals (see Martin 1990).

The mainline Christian response to the third and final problem of the world religions—the problem of lay heterodoxy—is equally distinctive. Like Islam (though Muslims insist their monotheism is purer than Christian trinitarianism), Christianity inherited Judaism's commitment to one God, and the monotheism it promoted had exclusivistic pretensions. Rather than incorporate extant spirits into a larger cosmological framework, as Hinduism and, in a somewhat different fashion (see Keyes's essay), Buddhism do, orthodox Christianity and Islam demand the recognition of a single godhead and the repudiation or, at the very least, cosmological demotion of lesser world spirits.

In the course of their histories both medieval Christianity and Islam relaxed their monotheism and incorporated a cult of the saints into their pantheons; the relaxation of monotheistic principles was taken even further in Gnostic and folk variants of Christianity (Badone 1990; Taylor 1987) and in some forms of folk Islam and Sufism (Lewis 1980; Nadel 1954). But the similarities between these two faiths hide an important difference in their clerical management. Lacking a centralized church structure, mainline Sunni Islam has tended to take an ecumenical stance toward indigenous clergy, allowing native clerics (who are, of course, not priests but specialists of religious and legal knowledge) to rise from popular ranks. In modern times, as I. M. Lewis (1980:82) has noted, this has allowed recent converts in places like West Africa and Southeast Asia to quickly identify the faith as indigenous and to use it as a rallying cry against foreigners and colonialism. At times, though by no means universally, it has also allowed for a more gradual accommodation of local cosmology to high doctrine.

By contrast, with its centralized hierarchy, the pre-Reformation church was less inclined to allow open admissions to the clergy. As Beidelman's (1982) East African study illustrates, even modern Protestant missions have been reluctant to allow such open access where the mission-pagan divide coincides with marked political and ethnic inequalities (see also Comaroff 1985; Farriss 1984). Such centralized control has created an organizational environment conducive to the strict management of doctrine and regular campaigns against heterodoxy. Merrill's essay in the present volume illustrates the complex relationship between administrative hierarchy and the suppression of heterodoxy in colonial Mexico; Farriss (1984) discusses a tragic example among the nearby Maya. Attitudes on clerical recruitment and doctrinal control vary among contemporary Christian denominations, of course. Modern

evangelical Christianity, in particular, has adopted a new and more open pattern of clerical recruitment (see Hefner, below, and Martin 1990). For much of its history, however, the looming presence of a well-organized church has disposed Christianity to regular campaigns against heresies that are themselves product, in part, of the great divide between clerical and popular cultures.

CONCLUSION: WORLD BUILDING AND TRANSCENDENCE

Like all the world religions Christianity represents a unique response to the problems of a plural world. Having originated in macrocosmic crisis, Christianity and the other world religions have developed distinctive institutions for controlling ethics, knowledge, and identity over time and space. For scholars accustomed to thinking of religion in purely theological terms, this conclusion may seem disappointingly thin. In fact, however, rather than diminishing the accomplishment of Christianity or other world religions, this perspective underscores their world-transforming achievement.

All the world faiths relativize received social ways by announcing a Truth without which, they claim, human existence has no real meaning. This foundational belief legitimates doctrines and rites to which, in principle, all people are to be drawn. It may also mandate the organization of institutions for the propagation of the faith and the sustenance of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) unlike any previously seen. For a social science that recognizes that problems of morality and self-identification are central to all social life (Blum 1987; Gadamer 1975; Hefner 1990, Shweder et al. 1987), this aspect of the world religions places them among the most remarkable achievements of human culture.

Indeed, these religions are without parallel in human history. Political empires and economic systems have come and gone, but the world religions have survived. *They are the longest lasting of civilization's primary institutions.* Their genius lies in their curious ability to renounce this world and announce another, more compelling and true. They relocate the divisive solidarities of language, custom, and region within a broader community and higher Truth. They do so ideally, of course, and it goes without saying that the ideal may be, and routinely is, ignored or violated by those who would use the Truth for other ends. At times, of course, redemptive ideals may lose their appeal. History is not linear, and communities once thrust into expansive world orders may suddenly turn inward. Alternately, as in the modern West, secular idioms may provide a non-spiritual alternative to the ideals of religious transcendence, or the give

and take of self-interested exchange may narrow moral vision and erode popular interest in projects of ethical transcendence.

But history suggests that the ideal of transcendence will endure. The message carries well in a world of expansive horizons and ethical challenge. In such contexts the world religions offer the promise of community recast according to a divine plan. It goes without saying that the promise is never fully realized. But the ideal survives. The very generality of its ethic allows this ideal to exert powerful influence on the most diverse human affairs and provides living testimony to one of the most enduring responses to the challenges of identity and morality in our complex world.

NOTES

1. It should be emphasized, however, that the reformulation of identity and morality that takes place in intercultural contacts can be mediated by other sociocultural arrangements as well. Ethnicity, nationalism, and political ideology, among others, can play just such a role. Pollock's essay in the present volume shows that intercultural contact in the Brazilian Amazon has given rise to a secular pan-Indianist ideology known as *comunidade*. Jordan's essay indicates that the elaborate constellation of ideas and practices surrounding Chinese ethnicity has served to provide a similar canopy for translocal identity. Like Comaroff's (1985) study of southern African Christianity, Ranger's examples from modern Africa demonstrate that religious, ethnic, and regionalist idioms are often interwoven in the same social movements. The present essay should not be interpreted, therefore, as attributing primacy to religious idioms in the reconstruction of macrocosmic identities. Rather, it seeks to place religion alongside other cultural media involved in the elaboration of translocal community. See Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), and Hefner (1990, 1991).

2. Among the most influential in the early study of conversion, the works of A. D. Nock (1933) and William James (1980:89) both display such a subjectivist bias, influenced no doubt by Protestant ideas as to what constitutes proper conversion. For James, conversion is "the process . . . by which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." It is not that such a deeply subjective reorientation never characterizes conversion, but that it is only one variety of conversion experience and one that provides an inadequate understanding of the conditions of its own possibility at that.

3. For reasons that will become clearer presently, my definition of world religion is a minimalist one, referring simply to those religions that, as Weber put it, "have known how to gather multitudes of confessors around them" (Weber 1946:267). This definition shifts attention from the difficult question whether these religions possess similar cosmologies (I suggest that on several key points

they do) to the simpler and more important feature of their success at "gathering multitudes"; I am primarily concerned with the logic of this success. I am less interested in determining which religions in which periods can properly be called world religions. Many religions—Hinduism being the most dramatic example—vacillate between the ideal-typical extremes of traditional and world religions; the purpose of classification here is not to pigeonhole the varieties of religion but to highlight certain ideological and organizational features the underlie the "success" of a few.

4. My characterization here is broad. It overlooks how in the nineteenth century evolutionary themes were more prominent among scholars (e.g., Tylor and Frazer) explicitly concerned with cross-cultural comparisons than among those (e.g., William James) who used the other approach to the study of religion popular at the time, psychologism. Not surprisingly, however, even among the latter, evolutionary biases often lie just below the surface. Though James (1982:29), for example, insists that he is not concerned with "the institutional branch" of religion but instead focuses on "personal religion, pure and simple," he makes blatant evolutionary assumptions throughout his text. He observes, for example, that "religion does in fact perpetuate the traditions of the most primeval thought" (1982:495), the qualities of which were an inability to distinguish fact from fantasy and a "coercive" attitude toward divinity. Nock (1933:2–3) characterizes conversion in similarly psychologistic terms, though his historical discussion is more subtle. To illuminate the distinctiveness of prophetic religions (his primary object of inquiry), however, Nock is obliged to invent a category of "religions of tradition" that, once again, reproduces the most simplistic evolutionist dichotomies.

5. Stanley Tambiah's recent essay (1990) provides a penetrating analysis of the origins and development of this modernist understanding of magic, science, and religion. Tambiah's essay allows one to place Weber in a Western genealogy broader than the one I can provide in the present discussion.

6. For excellent overviews of the Levy-Bruhl controversy, see Cole and Scribner (1974:19–24) and Tambiah (1990:84–110).

7. This tension between the local and global in world religions is a useful reminder that, viewed sociologically, no world religion has in fact ever been free from parochial associations. Rita Smith Kipp (1990:15) has expressed this point aptly, remarking that the contradiction between "Christianity as a Western attribute and a transcendent faith" has been a recurrent feature of missionary histories. In an excellent study of Christian symbolism in colonial Mexico, William Taylor (1987:11) remarks that the Christianity brought by Cortés to the New World contained many elements from Spanish "little tradition," but Aztec religion displayed many of the features commonly associated with "great traditions." For other examples of the way in which world religions can be thoroughly "localized," see, for Christianity, Barker (1983), Christian (1981), and three outstanding edited collections, Badone (1990), Schneider and Lindenbaum (1987), and Saunders (1988). For a similar perspective on Buddhism in local context see, among others, Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988), Ortner (1989), Smith (1978),

and Tambiah (1970). For several of many examples from Islam see Bowen (1991), Eickelman (1976), Lewis (1980), and Roff (1987). However, Roff (1987), Eickelman (1982, 1987), and Tambiah (1970) all provide cogent cautionary reminders of just why, as we explore world religions in local context, we must not lose sight of their transregional and transtemporal capacities.

8. Geertz's interest in evolutionary issues at this time showed the influence of his mentors, Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils. His recent work displays an entirely different cultural particularism, which avoids causal analysis and cross-cultural comparison in favor of a descriptivistic "appraisal" of cultural meanings (see Geertz 1983).

9. As Gianfranco Poggi (1983) has argued, it is best *not* to locate Weber's critique of Marx in the exhausted paradigm of "idealism" versus "materialism." Weber's mature views on the role of ideas in history steer clear of genuine idealism by insisting that ideas have historical significance inasmuch as they are institutionally embedded and borne by distinct social "carriers."

10. Pierre Bourdieu (1987:119) has aptly characterized this weakness in Weber's sociology of religion: "In his persistent efforts to make out a case for the historical efficacy of religious beliefs against the most reductionist forms of Marxist theory, Max Weber is sometimes led to privilege the notion of charisma in a manner that, as some writers have noted, is not without resonance of a Carlylean, 'heroic' philosophy of history." Arguing from a similar perspective, Kenelm Burridge provides an eloquent alternative to Weber on the social reality of prophetic charisma:

> Yet a prophet who asserted his lone singularity would not find himself welcome or wanted. He must fulfill his uniqueness not as singular merely, but as a particularly intense expression of those qualities which his audience regards as specifically fitting the nature of man. Not singular in a way that will make him an outcast, a prophet sees in himself all those to whom he speaks, and they see themselves in him—a communion from which charisma is surely born. (Burridge 1969:162)

11. A similar conceptual shift has recently occurred with the concept of culture in anthropology. The earlier image of culture as a "text" or unified corpus of symbols and meanings has given way to a new emphasis on its "distributional," pluralistic, and sometimes contested nature (Bourdieu 1977; Clifford 1986:19; Hefner 1990:239; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Ortner 1984; Schwartz 1978).

12. George Bond (1987) and Judith Shapiro (1987) present similar examples of traditional religions that are by no means immobile or inflexibly wed to local social structures.

13. On this point Horton's account resembles the widely influential "conjunctural" model Marshall Sahlins (1985) has developed for the analysis of cultural history. Like Horton, Sahlins emphasizes that structural dispositions within indigenous cosmologies are critical in mediating native perceptions of external forces.

14. The situation in the Dutch Indies as a whole was more complex than this simple statement might imply. Rita Smith Kipp (personal communication) has reminded me that outside Java the mission schools in the Dutch East Indies were

eligible for government subsidies after 1905, and the government also supported mission polyclinics and hospitals. She adds, "The government itself was not in the business of teaching Christianity or evangelizing, but it supported some of the 'social organizational' features that so often empower Christianity." Kipp's (1990) study of Dutch missionaries in the Karo lands of Sumatra provides additional detail on this complex relationship as well as an insightful anthropological account of the missionary project in general.

15. As I have discussed elsewhere (Hefner 1990:5, 239–44), this effort to bring self-identification into the center of theoretical discussion is related to the larger task of criticizing, and bridging, the opposition between meaning-centered or "interpretive" approaches in the human sciences, on one hand, and decision-making or "rational-actor" methodologies, on the other. A thoroughly revised concept of "self"-interest is pivotal in this effort. Rather than draw on the hollow shell of selfhood presented in economic models of human actors, such an alternative would replace the abstract *Homo economicus* with real people, situated in particular histories and cultures. Then it would listen carefully to learn who they are and who they wish to be. The "self" implicated in self-interest thus moves to the fore, forcing us to attend to the moral quality of social ties and their impact on a person's self-image and aspirations.

16. This point is discussed with great sensitivity by Gananath Obeyesekere (1981). Obeyesekere demonstrates that cultural meanings are not finished mental constructs but symbols that must be integrated through additional psychic "work" into the mind and practice of the individual.

17. This implies that we must qualify yet another feature of the orthodox-Weberian model of rationalization. The impulse for doctrinal universalization originates not so much in spiritual "disenchantment," as Weber (and Geertz [1973]) claimed, as in the commitment of key religious carriers to these absolute truths and the model of inclusive community they imply. Numerous ethnographic studies have demonstrated that "enchantment" (belief in magic and local spirits) is entirely compatible with adherence to a world faith. This is as true in traditional Islam and Christianity, whose official doctrines seem less tolerant of low-cosmological beliefs, as in Buddhism (see Keyes's and Jordan's essays, and Tambiah [1970]) and Hinduism, which tend to be more accommodating.

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