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Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States[1]

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This article reviews recent literature on U.S. religious institutions and argues that a new paradigm is emerging in that field, the crux of which is that organized religion thrives in the United States in an open market system, an observation anomalous to the older paradigm's monopoly concept. The article has six sections: first, a brief survey of the paradigm crisis; second, a development of the concept of an open market in the historiography and sociology of U.S. religion; third, fourth, and fifth, arguments that U.S. religious institutions are constitutively pluralistic, structurally adaptable, and empowering; sixth, a consideration of recent religious individualism in the light of the new paradigm. A conclusion sketches some research implications.

> In every scientific venture, the thing that comes first is Vision. That is to say, before embarking upon analytic work of any kind, we must first single out the set of phenomena we wish to investigate, and acquire "intuitively" a preliminary notion of how they hang together or, in other words, of what appear from our standpoint to be their fundamental properties. This should be obvious. If it is not, this is only owing to the fact that in practice we mostly do not start from a vision of our own but from the work of our predecessors or from ideas that float in the public mind. [JOSEPH A. SCHUMPETER, *History of Economic Analysis*]

INTRODUCTION

The sociology of American religion is undergoing a period of ferment, interpreted herein as a paradigm shift in process. This article is at once a partial review of a vast, rapidly growing literature and an attempt at

[1] Research for this article began when I was a visiting member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. Earlier formulations were presented to audiences at the institute in October 1988, Princeton Theological Seminary in February

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theoretical integration that draws tendentiously on certain strains within that literature. Thus the article is part of the very process it heralds.

The older paradigm—identified here with the early work of Peter Berger (1969, 1970)—is still cited by a great many researchers in the field and remains useful for understanding aspects of the phenomenology of religious life. However, those who use the older paradigm to interpret American religious organization—congregations, denominations, special purpose groups, and more—face increasing interpretive difficulties and decreasing rhetorical confidence. The newer paradigm—consciously under development by only a handful of independent investigators—stands a better chance of providing intellectual coherence to the field.

The newer paradigm stems not from the old one (Tschannen 1991), which was developed to account for the European experience, but from an entirely independent vision inspired by American history. Thus, rather than fully documenting the alleged deficiencies of the older paradigm (see Hadden 1987), this article will only briefly recount some recent developments in American religion that are anomalous from its perspective before turning to an exposition of the emerging new paradigm. Section I sketches the crisis in the old paradigm, and Section II presents the presuppositional key to the new paradigm, the idea that religious institutions in the United States operate within an open market. The balance of the article is a series of corollaries to this idea. Section III argues that institutional religion in the United States is constitutively pluralistic, Section IV that American religious institutions are structurally flexible, Section V that they can serve as vehicles of empowerment for minorities and otherwise subjugated people, and Section VI that recent individualistic tendencies in American religion are consistent with its history. A conclusion considers benefits to be gained from future research oriented to the new paradigm.

1989, a joint session of the American Sociological Association and the Association for the Sociology of Religion in San Francisco in August 1989, the Humanities Research Forum and the Office of Social Science Research of the University of Illinois at Chicago in January 1990, the Department of Sociology at Northwestern University in October 1991, and Swarthmore College in November 1991. I am indebted to members of these audiences for their reactions, to numerous colleagues for advice and commentary, and to the Institute for Advanced Study, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Northwestern University for support. Rather than implicate by name any of the many individuals who have commented on previous drafts and assisted with this one, I wish to express my deep appreciation to all of them, as well as to four referees for the *American Journal of Sociology*. Correspondence may be directed to R. Stephen Warner, Department of Sociology (M/C 312), University of Illinois at Chicago, Box 4348, Chicago, Illinois 60607-7140.

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The focus throughout is sociological, on religion as an institutional sector (Friedland and Alford 1991) rather than a primarily cultural or psychological phenomenon, and comparative in conception, focusing on the distinctive parameters of religion in American society, rather than on the evolution of "religion" as a generic phenomenon. Unless otherwise indicated, "America" refers to the United States and, for stylistic convenience, "American" to things pertaining to the society, government, or people of the United States.

I. ANOMALIES AND CRISIS

In *Protestant, Catholic, Jew,* a product of the 1950s, Will Herberg (1960) influentially portrayed a society suffused by religion. At that time, when cultural elites took liberal Protestant hegemony for granted, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich appeared on the cover of *Time,* and the claim of the National Council of Churches to represent nearly 40 million Americans still seemed credible (Herberg 1960, p. 134), it was not particularly striking that the majority of leaders of the civil rights movement were clergymen. But a generation later, when many educated Americans had come to believe that religion was inconsequential, the fact that the movement that had produced the most sweeping progressive social change in modern U.S. history was led by Protestant preachers (Morris 1984) struck many intellectuals as anomalous (Wills 1990).

The surprise that news of American religion has occasioned in the past 15 years—the incomprehension that met Jimmy Carter's confession as a born-again Christian; the embarrassment occasioned by Jesse Jackson's public prayers; the near panic that greeted the emergence of the New Religious Right; the incredulity met by regular reports that more than 90% of Americans believe in God and 70% in an afterlife, that nearly 90% report they pray and that the majority of those pray daily, that 70% claim church membership and 40% attend weekly (Gallup 1990; Davis and Smith 1991); the derision earned by Oral Roberts's reports of conversations with God; the patronizing response given to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pronouncements on peace and justice—testifies not so much to the state of American religion as to its misunderstanding by those who have been too deeply schooled in the conventional wisdom of social science. "The learned have their superstitions, prominent among them a belief that superstition is evaporating" (Wills 1990, p. 15).

This conventional social science wisdom is rooted in a paradigm that conceived religion, like politics, to be a property of the whole society, such that the institutionalized separation of state and church in modern society offered religion only two alternatives: either religious values would become increasingly generalized so that they could remain the

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property of the whole, increasingly pluralistic, society, or, if they remained resolutely particularistic, they would devolve to an inconsequential private sphere. The former alternative was theorized by Talcott Parsons (1960, 1967, 1969); the latter by Peter Berger (1969). We shall see below that religion in the United States has typically expressed not the culture of the society as a whole but the subcultures of its many constituents; therefore, that it should not be thought of as either the Parsonian conscience of the whole or the Bergerian refuge of the periphery, but as the vital expression of groups.

For the older paradigm, insofar as religion had a place in the lives of conventional Americans, it merely supported, or only decorated, the status quo; insofar as religion was obstreperous, it was likely found only on the margins of society. Thus, writing on the basis of his observations at midcentury, Talcott Parsons (1960, 1967, 1969) proposed that religion in modern society, to the extent that it was viable, was likely to be ascriptive in recruitment, generalized in content, and consensual in appeal. Yet, by the 1980s, previously descriptive designations like "Christian" and "humanist" became divisive labels, and arguments over the particular statuses of Jesus and the Bible took on renewed urgency. On the one hand, nearly one out of 10 Americans no longer professed a religion at all (Gallup 1988, p. 47). But on the other hand proselytizers were busy: one out of three persons reported that, sometime during the year ending in March 1988, they had been invited to join someone else's church (Gallup 1990, p. 29).

Conversely, Peter Berger said in 1970, defiant assertions of supernaturalism were "likely to be restricted to smaller groups, typically those whose social location (in 'backward' regions, say, or in the lower classes) gives them little interest or stake in the world of modernity" (Berger 1970, p. 21), but less than a decade later Mary Jo Neitz (1990, p. 91) "met lawyers and business executives . . . speaking in tongues and practicing faith healing" at a huge Roman Catholic charismatic prayer group meeting every Monday night in an affluent Chicago suburb (see also Neitz 1987). Pentecostalism was no longer peculiar to the down-and-out: Gallup (1988, p. 56) estimated that 9% of all Americans, including 8% of all U.S. college graduates, took part in a charismatic group in 1986–88. A startling phenomenon to those who expect religion to be innocuous and conventional is an energetic new Christian denomination of 22,000 members, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), which ministers to gays and lesbians on the basis of an orthodox trinitarian theology with echoes of pentecostalism (Perry and Swicegood 1990, esp. chap. 4; Warner 1989; Jacquet and Jones 1991, p. 262). Alongside the UFMCC are gay and lesbian congregations standing on their own (Thumma 1991) and operating within conventional

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Protestant denominations as well as in Catholic and Jewish communities (Gorman 1980). The sheer variety within American religion is staggering (Melton 1989).

Many scholars studying these developments—assertive particularism, resurgent traditionalism, creative innovation, and all-round vitality in American religion—have attempted to frame their reports using the "sacred canopy" perspective (Berger 1969), which is, after all, their disciplinary cultural capital. Yet inconclusive results have become chronic in the field (Ammerman 1987, esp. pp. 1–3; Christiano 1987, chap. 7; Davidman 1991, pp. 28–29, 203–4; Poloma 1989, p. 93; Prell 1989, pp. 161–65, 270). Others (e.g., Bender 1991; Finney 1991; Gilkes 1985; Gorman 1980; Kaufman 1991; Preston 1988; Rose 1987; Stacey 1990), especially feminist scholars, drawn to the field by interests more topical, moral, political, or personal than the theoretical interests defined by the sociology of religion, have produced reports unframed by either paradigm and thus subject to appropriation by both. That the reigning theory does not seem to work has become an open secret. Indeed, a sociological observer from abroad reports "the impression that, at least in the United States, it is the antisecularization thesis that has become the accepted wisdom" (Sharot 1991, p. 271). "Antisecularization," however, is a mere negation; it is not yet a paradigm.

Advocates of the older paradigm have by no means retired from the scene and, indeed, have counterattacked (Lechner 1991; Tschannen 1991). Using the apparatus of secularization, they have attempted to account for apparent anomalies such as the resurgence of fundamentalism (Lechner 1985) and the persistence of evangelical (Hunter 1983) and liberal (Roof 1978) Protestantism. They have reformulated "secularization" to make it conform better to the American experience (Chaves 1991*c*). Yet much of secularization theory's best evidence and most forceful advocacy comes from Europe, where secularization is arguably a historical fact as well as a theory (see Hadden 1987, pp. 589–91, 599).

The debate is unsatisfactory and will likely remain so until the opponents of the secularization paradigm develop their own paradigm. In the last few years, they have begun to do so.

II. THE CRUX OF THE MATTER: DISESTABLISHMENT AND RELIGIOUS MOBILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The emerging paradigm begins with theoretical reflection on a fact of U.S. religious history highly inconvenient to secularization theory: the proportion of the population enrolled in churches grew hugely throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, which, by any

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measure, were times of rapid modernization. Whereas about 10% of the population were church members at the time of the American Revolution, about 60% are so today, with particularly rapid growth registered in the 50 years preceding the Civil War and the Great Depression (Herberg 1960, pp. 47–50; Caplow, Bahr, and Chadwick 1983, pp. 28–29; Finke and Stark 1986; Stark and Finke 1988). One naive glance at the numbers is bound to give the impression that, in the experience of the United States, societal modernization went hand in hand with religious mobilization.[2] The end result is that, with the exception of "a few agrarian states such as Ireland and Poland," "the United States has been the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom" as well as "the most religiously fecund country" where "more new religions have been born . . . than in any other society" (Lipset 1991, p. 187).

In default of census data on individual religious affiliation, which the government may not inquire into, sociologists of religion employ what can be called "poll" data (sample surveys done by Gallup, NORC, etc.) and "roll" data (reports of internal counts by religious bodies themselves). Measured in terms of poll data, the current rate of adult church membership is between 69% (Gallup 1990, p. 43) and 61% (Davis and Smith 1991, p. 399); in roll data terms, the figure is 59% (Jacquet and Jones 1991, pp. 303, 265).[3] While mainline Protestant denominations have lost members since peaking in the mid-1960s and individually reported church membership has declined four or five percentage points from the 73% registered in polls at that time, it stretches these points mightily to see this slight and uneven decline over three decades as evidence for secularization theory, in view of about 10 previous decades of strong and positive zero-order correlations between church membership

[2] Peter Berger has recently acknowledged (1986, pp. 226–27) that his early work erred in supposing that modernity in the United States must lead to an erosion of communal, including religious, life. But it is his earlier work that is still influential in the field.

[3] It is noteworthy that reports of individual respondents (poll data) yield higher rates of church membership than ecclesiastical reports (roll data) for the high-status liberal Protestant denominations and lower rates for Roman Catholicism. Thus, many (and in the case of Presbyterians, most) of those who claim in sample surveys to be Protestant church members evidently do not comply with the denominations' membership requirements (e.g., regular attendance and contributions) but instead evidently feel a residual or anticipatory identification with the church community as a reference group. Many of those who claim to be church members are thus said to be effectively "unchurched" (Gallup 1988), thereby explaining the 10% discrepancy between poll data church membership and the corresponding roll data figure. The implications of these discrepancies represent a research frontier in the field (see Marcum 1990; Roof and McKinney 1987, pp. 177–79; Hadaway and Marler 1991*b*).

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and industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and most of the other processes that are thought to cause secularization.[4]

The research of historians helps us understand what is distinctive about American religious institutions (Hackett 1988). Despite the impression on the part of today's conservative Christians that the United States was founded as a Christian nation, the early decades of American independence were times of eclectic spiritual ferment but thinly distributed church membership. Jon Butler (1990), in *Awash in a Sea of Faith,* emphasizes widespread religious indifference in colonial New England and documents flourishing non-Christian strains of magic, astrology, and spiritualism in the antebellum years. In *The Democratization of American Christianity,* Nathan Hatch (1989) chronicles the strenuous efforts of early 19th-century revivalists to bring into religious fellowship the masses of common people who had been ignored by colonial religious establishments.

The great antebellum revivals, or the Second Great Awakening (ca. 1790–1830), have accordingly been interpreted by historians not as exercises in nostalgia but as strenuous, and largely successful, efforts at social organization (Mathews 1969; Smith 1968). "Worried about colonial spiritual lethargy since the seventeenth century, concerned about the rise of deism and skepticism among the political and social elite, propelled by a republican ideology to secure Christian foundations of American political virtue, and seeing in independence new opportunities to win adherents, religious leaders rushed to proselytize citizens in a growing nation" (Butler 1990, p. 274). The enormous growth of the Catholic church in the United States later in the 19th century was similarly not merely a matter of the importation of pre-existing religious commitments but the result of strenuous effort by revivalists worried about apostasy of spiritual kinsfolk in a dominantly Protestant culture (Dolan 1978; Finke 1988).

The analytic key to the new paradigm is the disestablishment of the churches and the rise of an open market for religion, the process that intervened between colonial lethargy and antebellum fervor. Establishment was not uniform across the colonies and disestablishment did not

[4] In order to account for recent downturns in religion, some analysts seem to posit that modernity arrived in the United States only in the 1960s, which, in effect, abandons the secularization *paradigm* for a *finding* of "secularization" over a two-decade period (cf. Chaves 1991*c,* p. 502). Much more promising from the point of view of the new paradigm is to focus on such specific factors as governmental activity (Wuthnow and Nass 1988) and family formation (Chaves 1991*c*) as variables affecting church membership and attendance. Meanwhile, overall church attendance has been remarkably stable for the last two decades (Hout and Greeley 1987; Greeley 1989; Chaves 1989, 1991*c;* Firebaugh and Harley 1991) and specifically Protestant church attendance for the last half-century.

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occur overnight in 1789, for the First Amendment prohibited only Congress (not the states) from establishing religion. Disestablishment was the fruit of an ironic alliance between deistic political elites and insurgent evangelical firebrands (Littel 1962; Mead 1963; Finke 1990), and it had two profound implications for the institutional order of religion: first, protection for the free exercise of religion in general, second, no protection for any religious organization in particular. For the people, there was freedom of worship. For the churches, it was sink or swim, and the market share of Congregationalists started quickly to sink, whereas the Baptists and Methodists swam expertly (Herberg 1960, pp. 103–7; Finke and Stark 1989*a*). The long-term result of disestablishment was a far higher level of religious mobilization than had existed before.

Thus, rather than viewing American religion as a mere exception to or negation of the pattern of European establishment, new paradigm sociologists have learned from historians to view U.S. religion as institutionally distinct and distinctively competitive. Table 1 dramatizes the difference between the new and old paradigms.

Economic imagery is widespread among students of American religion. The historian Butler writes of Baptists developing "national spiritual markets" and observes that denominational leaders on the postrevolutionary frontier "read maps with an intensity that challenged land speculators" (1990, pp. 275–76). The historian Terry Bilhartz (1986, p. 139) focused on "the marketing skill of . . . competing venders" in his monograph on religion in post-Revolutionary Baltimore, and he casually introduced "supply-side" imagery to the discussion. This imagery was later developed by Hatch into a theory of "competition in the religious marketplace" among spiritual "entrepreneurs" in a "divine economy" (1989, pp. 15, 67, 101). Anthropologists Irving Zaretsky and Mark Leone (1974, p. xxxvi) write that American religion "is the last voice for decentralization and the free enterprise system." Sociologist Richard Lee (1992, p. 6) claims that "both religious and economic behavior are shaped by a common independent variable, reward," and Andrew Greeley (1989, p. 122) agrees that "a 'rational choice' theory does much to explain the persistence of religion in the United States." Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge (1985, 1987) developed an elaborate theory of "the religious economy," and Finke and Stark (1992) have used the theory to account for 200 years of organizational success and failure of U.S. religious bodies. The economist Laurence Iannaccone found an early statement of the market theory of religion in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and tested it with cross-national data. He found that, "among Protestants, at least, church attendance and religious belief both are greater in countries with numerous competing churches than in countries dominated by a single church" (Iannaccone 1991, p. 157).

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TABLE 1

SCHEMATIC COMPARISON OF NEW AND OLD PARADIGMS

	New	Old
Paradigmatic situation	Competition	Monopoly
Best historical fit	Second Great Awakening	Medieval Catholicism
Place and time	United States, early 19th century	Europe, 500–1500 C.E.
Master narrative	Revival and routinization	Linear secularization
Master process	Mobilization	Differentiation
Secularity threatens	Irksome demands	Implausible beliefs
Elite prototype	Entrepreneur	Prebendary
View of pluralism	Constitutive	Degenerative
Social base	Social groups	Whole society
Typical organization	Denomination, congregation	Universal church, parish
Function of religion	Solidarity, morale	Explanation, meaning
Identity	Contested	Taken-for-granted
Recruitment	Emergent, achieved	Primordial, ascribed
Today's figures	Stark, Finke, Greeley	Berger, Lechner, Hunter
Classic texts	"Protestant Sects" and *Elementary Forms*	*Protestant Ethic* and *Division of Labor*

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The new paradigm is not *defined* by economic imagery, however, but by the idea that disestablishment is the norm. For instance, Berger's statement that in contemporary America "religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities" (Berger 1969, p. 138) is an often-cited observation (see also Hammond 1986). Still, Berger represents the older paradigm, dominated by the scenario of European secularization, not the emerging one, which is based on and specifically describes and explains the American experience. For Berger, the *modern* American market situation is a degenerate one of "loss," "rupture," "deprivation," "fragility," "tenuousness," and "crisis" (1969, chap. 6), whereas the paradigmatic, durable, *traditional* situation is one in which religions are "authoritatively imposed" as "monopolies" by the "coercive support" of the state (1969, pp. 138, 135, 131). According to Berger, the market situation of religion in modern society deprives religious institutions of the support of coerced monopoly; above all they lack the support of being "taken for granted" that arises in the absence of ideological competition.

Accordingly, when Bergerians are confronted with some old-fashioned religion thriving in modern America, they feel constrained to account for it as a kind of deviant case. Thus the analyst focuses on the surrogate supports, called "plausibility structures," that the group provides itself. Such framing of the research usually requires that the ethnographer concentrate on the sociological commonplace that members of a group surround themselves with like-minded others. The reader learns indeed how the group cognitively defends itself but, unless other theoretical sources are drawn upon, little of how it organizationally expresses itself (Wuthnow 1986).

Contrary to the sacred canopy concept, ethnographers (e.g., Snow and Machalek 1982) have argued that maintaining supernatural religious beliefs in U.S. society is not particularly difficult, and opinion pollers have found high levels of self-reported belief in God and devotional and attitudinal religiosity (praying daily, reading the Bible, etc.) among the "unchurched" (those who do not regularly participate in a religious body; see Gallup 1988; Davis and Smith 1991). This suggests that other factors than "implausibility" (e.g., anger at church pronouncements on birth control) are at work in whatever religious disaffection does exist in the United States (Greeley 1989).

Thus one result of the older paradigm was that relatively too much attention was paid to the question of maintaining deviant religious cognitions and too little to what the religion in question did for its adherents and they for it in the real world. The work of James Davison Hunter is a case in point. Hunter devoted his first two monographs (Hunter 1983, 1987) to the quandaries and compromises modern America poses for

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conservative Christians, leaving for a third (Hunter 1991) the question of the cultural challenge that conservative Christians pose for modern America. Since Hunter is an intelligent, energetic, resourceful, and empirically responsible scholar, his work can be appropriated for the new paradigm despite his Bergerian presuppositions.

Another result of taking the monopolistic situation as the norm is an illusory focus on the shock posed to religious organizations by their adjustment to the circumstances of pluralism. It is said that churches can "*no longer* take for granted" the loyalty of clients. Their ideas, "which *previously* could be authoritatively imposed," now must be marketed. In the pluralistic situation, religious activity "*comes* to be dominated by the logic of market economics" (Berger 1969, p. 138; emphasis added). Thus does Peter Berger account for the secularizing, homogenizing, psychologizing tendencies of religion in the contemporary United States, as if a few gigantic, previously privileged suppliers had been suddenly confronted a few decades ago by hordes of price-conscious consumers (see also Luckmann 1991, pp. 176–79). Yet it has been nearly two centuries since religion in the United States could be coercively imposed. Very few of the hundreds of religious organizations flourishing in the United States today—arguably only the Episcopal church (Swatos 1979)—have had to adjust to a pluralistic situation. Most of them were born into it.

The adjustment-to-pluralism model is not groundless. It matches the personal and familial experience of some groups from which religion scholars derive. Eastern European Jews came to the United States from encapsulated, religiously monolithic communities, and their offspring are aware of the contrast of traditional and modern worlds (Davidman 1991, pp. 34–37; Furman 1987, pp. 130–31). Bergerian theory narrates the psychological experience of intellectuals who emerge from religiously conservative families to the religiously indifferent world of the academy, where they learn that religion is socially constructed and that theirs is only one of many systems of meaning (Wacker 1984). People with such biographies have undergone psychologically the perforation of a sacred canopy that the old paradigm attributes sociologically to Western society as a whole. Bergerian theory can thus succeed as a phenomenology of religious lives where it fails as a theory of American religious organizations.

Contributors to the new paradigm have not reached consensus on all matters. Historians (Marsden 1990; Michaelson 1990) might well be surprised to hear the work of Jon Butler (1990) and Nathan Hatch (1989) attributed to the same "new paradigm," for Butler's long-standing focus on religious authoritarianism is known to contrast with Hatch's equally persistent stress on consumer sovereignty. Yet not only does each endorse

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the other's book,[5] both agree on the fundamental point that, however it is to be evaluated, the Christianization of the United States was neither a residue of Puritan hegemony nor a transplantation of a European sacred canopy but an accomplishment of 19th-century activists. This fundamental point is itself hardly new to historians and was central to those upon whom Herberg relied (e.g., Mead 1963). Indeed, more recent in religious historiography are challenges from European-oriented Marxian and Foucauldian perspectives. But Butler and Hatch join forces with the new paradigm sociologists in stressing the distinctive properties of U.S. religious institutions against such challenges.[6]

Those who use economic imagery do not agree on the full logic of market analysis as applied to religion or on all its empirical corollaries. For example, the rational consumer of religious commodities is as often imagined to be fickle as to be brand loyal. Analysts as different as Finke and Stark, Bellah and associates, and Berger look for signs of individual religious mobility as evidence of religious rationality, whereas Iannaccone, Greeley, and Lee model steadiness of religious identity as a means of reaping rewards of investments in religious cultural capital.[7] On the organizational side, the free marketplace of religion is expected by Stark and Bainbridge (1985) to exhibit inexhaustible variety and by Iannaccone (1986) to offer sectarian as well as churchly alternatives, whereas Berger (1969, p. 148) expects to find "standardization and marginal differentiation." A paradigm is not yet a theory but a set of ideas that make some questions more obvious and urgent than others. Much remains to be specified.

In particular, debate has arisen in the literature over the effects of pluralism on religion. Finke and Stark, the most outspoken exponents of the new paradigm, assert categorically that "the more pluralism, the

[5] Butler's "book is path-breaking and simply has no competitor in treating the full scope of religious history in early America" (Hatch on the dust jacket of Butler's book); Hatch's "deeply researched, superbly written book goes to the very heart of the American religious and cultural development" (Butler on the dust jacket of Hatch's book).

[6] Butler (1990, pp. 297, 345) cites the work of Stark and Finke (1988; Finke and Stark 1986), and Hatch (1989, p. 298) cites that of Caplow (1985).

[7] Nor do all theorists assume religious wants to be exogenous in the manner of pure microeconomics (cf. Friedland and Alford 1991, pp. 232–35). On the contrary, it seems to be a widespread notion among new paradigm exponents that Americans' high level of religious interest is due in part to the historic vigor of religious organizations in this country (Iannaccone 1991, pp. 161–62). A path-breaking article by Gary Becker and Kevin Murphy (1988, p. 675) begins with an epigram from Shakespeare, "Use doth breed a habit," and argues that addictions, which are the dependent variable, "require *interaction* between a person and a good" (p. 694; emphasis added).

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greater the religious mobilization of the population" (1988, p. 43). The exchange began when Finke and Stark (1988) argued that they had successfully tested that claim using turn-of-the-century census data. These data had previously been analyzed by Kevin Christiano (1987), who had expected consistency with the older paradigm but was surprised by mixed results. Kevin Breault (1989*a*, 1989*b*) then defended the older paradigm's expectations with both a critique of Finke and Stark's methods and an analysis of another, contemporary, data set. More recently, Judith Blau, Kenneth Land, and their associates have entered the fray, testing elaborate models on data from 1910 to 1930 (Land, Deane, and Blau 1991) and from 1850 to 1930 (Blau, Redding, and Land 1991). They reject Finke and Stark's pluralism theory with the conclusion, "It may be true that America has exceptionally much religious diversity and also exceptionally high rates of religious membership, but the two are not causally related—at least not positively" (Blau et al. 1991, p. 36).

The debate on pluralism is unresolved and the issues are complex, having to do with measures of religious diversity, proper units of analysis, the adequacy of various data sets, the possibility that causal forces differ for Protestant and Catholic contexts and that causal relationships may have changed over time, and other matters. But resolution seems close on two issues. The older expectation (see Christiano 1987) that cities are necessarily inimical to religion has been refuted; indeed, U.S. cities and their modern economy evidently provide resources and conditions conducive to religious mobilization (Finke and Stark 1988; Blau et al. 1991; Olson 1993). Score one for the new paradigm.

On the other hand, Finke and Stark (1988, 1989*b*) have conceded what Christiano (1987) earlier found, that religious concentration, in the sense of numerical predominance of one denomination in a geographical area, does not necessarily militate against religious vitality, particularly if that denomination is Catholic. Iannaccone (1991, p. 171) reports that this theoretical complication was also recognized by Adam Smith for Catholic countries in the 18th century. If, as in the case of Ireland and Poland, the church is allied with a sense of submerged nationalism (Lipset 1991), or—as in the American instances of Utah Mormons, turn-of-the-century urban Catholics, and postbellum Southern Baptists—the geographically concentrated group perceives itself to be a minority surrounded by a hostile culture (Shipps 1985; Finke and Stark 1988, pp. 44–46; 1989*b*, pp. 1054–56; Wacker 1991), the regionally dominant church is less likely to lapse into the complacency that a protected position invites. Conversely, if, as in France, a monopolistic church is allied with the widely despised, losing side in a nationwide struggle, it will languish.

Finke and Stark, Iannaccone, and Blau and Land and their associates all employ a measure of monopoly/competition that is based on the rela-

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tive homogeneity/diversity of religious affiliation within a given unit, but Iannaccone (1991) argues that neither models of pure monopoly (literally, a single supplier of religion) nor pure competition (countless small suppliers) is realistic in the discussion of religion. Instead, he suggests (Iannaccone 1991, pp. 160–63) that religious disestablishment should be measured by the relative prevalence of government subsidies to or interference in religion. Chaves and Cann (1992) take up his suggestion; measuring state regulation directly, they provide more evidence for the proposition that an open market is conducive to religious vitality.

Such is the contribution of Hatch's supply-side imagery: what is important about religious markets from this perspective is not so much the diversity of alternatives available to consumers as the incentive for suppliers to meet consumers' needs, which is maximized when the religious economy is wide open to energetic entrants, none of whom has a guaranteed income. Consider the phenomenally influential Oral Roberts, whose career is a key to Pentecostalism breaking out of its class-, race-, and region-based boundaries in the second half of this century. Roberts was ordained at age 18 as a preacher in the Pentecostal Holiness denomination, which, "like most new sects, had a vast oversupply of ministers" (Harrell 1985, p. 20). The ambitious Roberts soon outgrew his denomination and at age 30 invested $60,000 in his own infrastructure: a truck-and-trailer rig, portable organ, piano, sound system, folding chairs, and a tent with room for 3,000. Four years later, he bought a tent big enough for 12,500 and soon began broadcasting (these biographical details come from Harrell [1985, esp. pp. 20–21, 51]). For Roberts and entrepreneurs like him, ordination was not a sinecure, but a license with a built-in incentive to reach out to new audiences through innovative means.

Accordingly, the concept of a competitive religious market entails neither that religious organizations pander to a lowest common denominator of spiritual commitment nor that religious consumers constantly compare competing suppliers' responses to their fixed demands (cf. Scherer 1988, p. 481; Wuthnow 1991, pp. 6–7). For example, evangelical Protestants are currently worried about the presumed mass defection of inner-city African-Americans to Islam (e.g., Guthrie 1991), and Catholic bishops are concerned about the reported defection of Hispanics to Pentecostalism (e.g., National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1984). No matter that, because the U.S. Census Bureau may not inquire into individuals' religion, hard data on such trends are lacking: widely repeated anecdotes and case studies help mobilize countermeasures that initially take the form of paying more attention to the client at risk, where the supplier changes the distribution of its effort, not its basic teaching (e.g., Fitzpatrick 1990). Thus, research indicates that recent denominational growth and decline patterns are largely explained by patterns of new

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church plantings (foundings of new congregations, parishes, and missions; see Hadaway 1990; Marler and Hadaway 1992). Religious organizations cannot succeed in the market unless they bring their services to consumers, but the new paradigm does not claim that religious entrepreneurs are insincere about their product. Quite the contrary.

If the paradigmatic situation for Bergerians is the sacred canopy, the religious monopoly inaugurated in Europe by Constantine in the 4th century, then for market theorists it is the furious competition to evangelize North America in the 19th, the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening and later (Warner 1991). The competitive patterns that emerged two centuries ago in the United States constitute "an institutionally specific cultural system" (Friedland and Alford 1991, p. 234), which minimizes state interference in religion and permits adaptation to an always changing society.

III. THE MASTER FUNCTION OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES: SOCIAL SPACE FOR CULTURAL PLURALISM

Unity is a normative ideal for Christian ethicists and an analytic presupposition for their old-paradigm cousins. But, from the beginning, religion in the United States has been associated with societal differentiation, and pluralism has tended in this society to take on a religious expression. During colonial times, New England was the stronghold of Congregationalism; New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches; and Virginia of Anglicanism. Religion and region are associated to this day (Stump 1984; Hill 1985). But already by the time of the American Revolution, the Anglicans were relatively stronger on the coast and the Baptists in the hinterland, and another axis of variation—urban-rural—came into play, with a distinct social class component soon overlaid upon it as the Methodists and Baptists swept across the frontiers of upstate New York, the Ohio River Valley, and the Appalachian Piedmont. At the present time, Episcopalians, the successors to the Anglicans, still outrank Baptists and Methodists not only in income and education but also in the likelihood of urban residence.

These three demographic factors—region, social class, and urbanism—at first served to differentiate from each other a dozen or so denominations of mostly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, but by the middle of the 19th century, religion in the United States became much more multicultural, with race, ethnicity, and national origin added to the demographic differentiators of religious denominations. The immigration of masses of Catholics and Jews (as well as more Lutherans) from Germany and Catholics from Ireland increased the sociological salience of

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religious identity itself, the Civil War intensified religious sectionalism, and the rapid rise of African-American churches after the war added a color line between the churches (instead of simply within them). At the turn of the 19th century, immigration from Scandinavia gave language and national identity renewed religious significance for Lutherans and Baptists, and that from eastern and southern Europe strengthened minority religious groups—Catholics, Jews, and Eastern Orthodox—whose claims on constituents' loyalties were at least as strong as those of the older Protestant bodies.

These social factors in religious differentiation—class, race, ethnicity, language, urbanism, region, and the like—are not simply templates on which religious association is modeled, nor are they merely identities people carry as individuals from one locale to another, identities destined to fade as the carriers die. Religion itself is recognized in American society, if not always by social scientists, as a fundamental category of identity and association, and it is thereby capable of grounding both solidarities and identities (Herberg 1960).

First of all, religion is constitutive for some American subcultures. From early colonial days to the present many groups came to this country to practice their religion unmolested: English Puritans and French Huguenots, German Mennonites and Russian Jews, Tibetan Buddhists and Iranian Baha'is. Others, like Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, began in America, withdrew from the wider culture into their own geographical and associational enclaves, and then brought their new ideas back to the world. Originally a protest movement of American whites, Jehovah's Witnesses have recruited substantial numbers of African-Americans to their cause (Cooper 1974) and expanded the social space available for other religious protest movements (Fields 1982); Seventh Day Adventism created a worldwide health-oriented religious culture (Bull and Lockhart 1989); and Mormonism became "a separate and distinct religious tradition in its own right" (Shipps 1985, p. xi), the first world religion created in the United States.

Second, religion in America has historically promoted the formation of associations among mobile people. Many frontier settlements were consolidated when the pioneers set up churches. The principle of voluntary, congregational church membership made "a concrete social contribution [that] was to provide a means for hitherto complete strangers, migrants on the frontier, to establish close personal relations quickly" (Miyakawa 1964, p. 214). The same was true of transatlantic migrants. "Immigrant congregations . . . were not transplants of traditional institutions but communities of commitment and, therefore, arenas of change. Often founded by lay persons and always dependent on voluntary support, their structures, leadership, and liturgy had to be shaped to meet

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pressing human needs" (Smith 1978, p. 1178). In a system where religious institutions comprehend not the whole society but subcultures, modernity, migration, and mobility make it possible for people to found religious associations that are at once self-selected and adapted to present circumstances (Olson 1992).

Third, religion in America serves as a refuge of free association and autonomous identity, a "free social space" (Evans and Boyte 1986). Throughout its history, the United States has been a dynamic, rapidly changing society, particularly in its economic aspect, with a political constitution that protects minority religious rights at the same time that it stifles minority political representation (Wuthnow 1991, p. 295). In such a setting, religion is a refuge for cultural particularity. Such was the heart of Will Herberg's theory of American religion.

> Of the immigrant who came to this country it was expected that, sooner or later, either in his own person or through his children, he would give up virtually everything he had brought with him from the "old country"—his language, his nationality, his manner of life—and would adopt the ways of his new home. Within broad limits, however, his becoming an American did not involve his abandoning the old religion in favor of some native American substitute. Quite the contrary, not only was he expected to retain his old religion, as he was not expected to retain his old language or nationality, but such was the shape of America that it was largely in and through his religion that he, or rather his children and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life. [Herberg 1960, pp. 27–28]

Later I shall cite Herberg's own qualification of the notion that "old country" religion is simply "retained." Yet his argument helps us to understand why religion remains the preeminent voluntary associational form in our society (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992).

Yet such constitutive pluralism is foreign to the older paradigm. Religious prophets scorn the social functions of particularistic religious participation in the United States and they long for signs of religious unity. The theologian H. Richard Niebuhr (1929) was scandalized by the denominational particularism he did so much to analyze. Will Herberg, as much a theologian as a sociologist, celebrated the "triple melting pot" that transmuted multitudinous nationalities into three nationwide religious communities, and he openly cheered the victory of the (Americanizing and mostly Irish) Roman Catholic hierarchy over the (particularly German) movement for ethnic dioceses within the American church (Herberg 1960, pp. 144–45). Both Niebuhr and Herberg appreciated the role that genuine religion played for communal identity in a rapidly modernizing, pluralistic society, but the fact that mass migration, one of the major and arguably least illegitimate sources of American religious

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pluralism, was all but shut down in the years they wrote made the persistence of pluralism seem all the more perverse.[8] Their moralistic attitude influenced others to interpret pluralism—beyond the legitimate Protestant-Catholic-Jew trinity—as evidence of weak religion (Berger 1961; 1969, pp. 108, 200) rather than the paradigmatic situation of religion in America.

Recent immigration has given a new boost to religious pluralism, which is just starting to receive the attention of students of religion (e.g., Christiano 1991; Denny 1987; Hurh and Kim 1990; Kivisto 1992; Numrich 1992; Warner 1990; Waugh 1992; Williams 1988). The religious experiences of immigrants from the 1840s through the 1920s—Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Jews, overwhelmingly European—have been analyzed by historians central to the new paradigm (e.g., Dolan 1975, 1985, 1988; Smith 1971, 1978), but since 1965 there has been a whole new stream of immigration. Nearly as many people entered the country in the past quarter century (1966–90) as did between 1890 and 1914 (14 million compared to 17 million; see Keeley 1991). Moreover, the "new" immigrants are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously more heterogeneous than those of a century ago. One result is that the purely religious boundaries of American religious pluralism have expanded with the recent addition of about as many Muslims and Buddhists to the U.S. population as there are adherents of the Eastern Orthodox churches, and a significant number of Hindus have arrived as well (Kosmin and Lachman 1991). Yet despite the novelty of these beliefs, many of the processes of immigration and religious settlement today are similar to those of the past.

Because of restrictions on the U.S. Census Bureau, firm data are hard to come by on the religious profile of the new immigrants and other expanding minorities. We do not know for certain the religious affiliations of the 22.4 million Hispanics, 1.6 million Chinese, 1.4 million Filipinos, 897,000 Indo-Pakistanis, 848,000 Japanese, and 799,000 Koreans recorded by the 1990 census (*Asian American Handbook* 1991, p. 9.61), nor the 919,000 refugees admitted from Southeast Asia between 1975 and 1989 (Rutledge 1992, p. 37). However, locally based studies have recently been conducted of some new immigrant religious identities and associations: Asian Indians in Atlanta (Fenton 1988), Chicago, Houston, and

[8] Keeley (1991) has pointed out that large-scale de facto migration of Mexican laborers continued from 1942 to 1964 through the *bracero* program. Moreover, until 1946, the Philippines were a U.S. possession, and substantial numbers of Filipinos came as U.S. nationals in the 1920s (Kitano and Daniels 1988, pp. 78–83). The religious institutions of both groups—Mexican-Americans and Filipino-Americans—have received astonishingly little scholarly attention.

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elsewhere (Williams 1988); Sri Lankans in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles (Blackburn 1987; Numrich 1992); Muslims in Toledo (Denny 1987), rural Alberta (Waugh 1992), and three unnamed locations in the northeastern United States (Haddad and Lummis 1987); Iranians in Los Angeles (Bozorgmehr et al. 1990); Thai Buddhists in Chicago (Numrich 1992); Vietnamese in Oklahoma City (Rutledge 1982); and Koreans in Chicago and Los Angeles (Hurh and Kim 1990; Warner 1990; Yu 1988)—and patterns seem to be consistent with the experiences of earlier immigrants.

First, today as in the past, ethnic and religious mobilization and minority consciousness often begin in the home country, "amidst complex economic and cultural rivalries" (Smith 1978, p. 1165). Vietnam is culturally divided along Buddhist, Catholic, and other lines, and so are immigrant Vietnamese (Rutledge 1982, 1992). "Asian Indians" are united by a U.S. census category, but elsewhere they are divided by religion into Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, and other groups, and by language into Hindi, Punjabi, Malayalee, Gujarati, and others. Urdu-speaking Muslims may be Pakistani or Indian in national origin (Williams 1988). Neither in the homeland nor in the United States are these identities "taken for granted" in the manner of the older paradigm.

Second, immigrant identities are not fixed after migration to the United States (Smith 1978; Sollors 1988). National, regional, linguistic, religious, and other country-of-origin affiliations vary in their contribution to the emigration process and become more or less salient in the United States (Williams 1988). A critical mass of the respective grouping may or may not be present in the U.S. locality; when it is absent, solidary groups may be broader in recruitment but thinner in commitment. The host culture itself contains "proximal hosts" (Mittelberg and Waters 1992), preexisting ethnic and racial groupings into which the host society places the immigrants, who, in turn, may reject their ascription. Group consciousness is also affected by the vagaries of interaction with agents of the host society: federal immigration authorities and census takers stress national origin, local school districts and potential employers are concerned with language, a few underfunded networks focus on gender, and some resettlement agencies care about religion (Gold 1987).

Third, because religion in the United States "is an accepted mode both of establishing distinct identity and of intercommunal negotiation" (Williams 1988, p. 3) and because migration itself is "often a theologizing experience" (Smith 1978, p. 1175), religious association may be more salient for both individuals and the group after immigration than it had been before immigration. This effect seems to pertain particularly for contemporary Indian, Pakistani, and Korean immigrants (Williams 1988; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Hurh and Kim 1990; Lee 1991). Perhaps the

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most distinctively religious new immigrant group are Korean-Americans, half of whom, as sampled by Hurh and Kim (1990), report premigration membership in Christian churches but another quarter of whom affiliate with Christian churches after arriving in this country. By 1988, Korean immigrants had established some 2,000 congregations in the United States (Lee 1991). Religion does not always take on increased salience. In Los Angeles, for example, ethnic Muslim refugees from the Iranian Islamic revolution have shied away from mosques during their relatively brief residence in the United States (Bozorgmehr et al. 1990). But religion is widely available to new immigrants as a legitimate institutional form (Williams 1988).

Fourth, the institutions established by immigrants are affected by generational succession. Early in the experience of the first generation, the immigrant congregation approximates a gemeinschaft within the gesellschaft, a remembrance of Zion in the midst of Babylon, and for that among other reasons Muslim women are more visible in American mosques than in Middle Eastern ones (Waugh 1992; Haddad and Lummis 1987) and competition increases among men for positions of clerical and lay leadership in Korean-American congregations (Hurh and Kim 1990; Shin and Park 1988). For the first generation, religion is in part a refuge from America. But the arrival of a second generation, now as in the past (Niebuhr 1929), suggests to many participants that some old country ways, in particular, language, must be sacrificed in order to maintain the attention of the children (Numrich 1992). Conducting worship in the English language is one of the classic paths by which America transmutes ethnicity into religion, where what gives the group its identity is no longer Urdu, for example, but Islam (Hathout, Osman, and Hathout 1989; Williams 1988, pp. 282–83), not Japanese but Buddhism (Mullins 1988; Kashima 1990), not Yiddish but Judaism (Herberg 1960, p. 31).

In addition to international migration as a factor in religious pluralism, there is internal migration, particularly that impelled by culture, of which the migration of gay men to major cities since World War II is prototypical. Frances FitzGerald (1986, p. 27) cites a late 1970s report that more than three-fourths of the population of the Castro, San Francisco's gay district, had moved to that city within that decade. With such massive population shuffling in mind and a view of the Bay Area in front of her as she stood on one of the city's hills, FitzGerald conceived a new metaphor for the social mechanism at work in contemporary American cultural life, "*not a melting pot but a centrifuge* that spun [people] around and distributed them out again across the landscape according to new principles," including income and life-style (1986, p. 16; emphasis added). On the basis of such social sorting into a gathered community

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(and his own energy and imagination), the religious entrepreneur Troy Perry founded the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles in 1968 (Dart 1969, 1991; Perry 1972; Warner 1989). Thus, the grounds on which Americans gather and find one or another religious message compelling, grounds that have historically included geography, social class, race, national origin, generation, ethnicity, and language, now also include gender, sexual orientation, "life-style," and moral culture.

The work of Daniel Olson (1989, 1993) has shed light on the anomaly (to the older paradigm) that religious institutions flourish in this most mobile of societies. On the one hand, it is a well-established generalization that geographic mobility is inversely correlated in the short run with religious participation (Wuthnow and Christiano 1979; Finke 1989). It seems that mobility disrupts the social networks that support regular church attendance. On the other hand, as we have seen, transatlantic migrants invigorated American religious life in the 19th century and at least some of the post-1965 immigrants are doing so today. Moreover, churches located in growing communities—particularly suburbs—have a better chance of growing in membership than those in stable or declining areas (see, e.g., Roof et al. 1979). Furthermore, denominations grow when they "plant" new churches and decline when they do not (Marler and Hadaway 1992). Assuming that one of the motivations for religious participation in the United States is the desire for friendly and culturally supportive associations, Olson argues that members of old and stable churches tend to have all the friends they want, but that new churches are likely to have many members whose demand for church-based friendships are not yet satiated. They therefore make room in their lives for newcomers (Olson 1989). Claude Fischer's (1982) work suggests that larger communities facilitate cobelievers' spending time with each other, so that urbanism can promote religious communalism rather than homogenization. Locations with high rates of in-migration thus offer attractive markets for aggressive religious organizations.

IV. STRUCTURAL ADAPTABILITY

Religious forms are typically sacralized. For example, "apostolic succession" in the leadership structure of Catholic and Episcopal churches is a hallowed doctrine traced to Jesus's laying his hands on Simon Peter, and the "divine liturgy" in the Orthodox church is claimed to represent an unbroken patriarchal tradition well over a thousand years old. The older paradigm theoretically privileges religious establishments and is inclined to take their word for what is truly "religious" and what is "worldly." But because of disestablishment, U.S. religious forms have historically been malleable. Thus in America today there are Roman

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Catholic parishes pastored, de facto, by women (Wallace 1992), and Orthodox churches where scriptures are read (with an American accent) also by women (Warner 1992). Religious forms change in the United States, and Herberg (1960, p. 83) knew better than to say that they are only "retained" from historical patterns: "religion in America has tended toward a marked disparagement of 'forms,' whether theological or liturgical." But the new paradigm does not regard religious change as presumptive evidence of "worldliness."

From the perspective of Europe, where the universal "church" was the social and theoretical norm against which the radical "sect" perennially protested, the American "denomination"—making little claim to inclusiveness yet also working within the world—was a structural innovation (Niebuhr 1929; Smith 1968; Swatos 1979). The voluntarism of the U.S. religious system has also facilitated the development, since early in the 19th century, of parachurch "special purpose groups" (Wuthnow 1988, chap. 6), both bureaucracies (e.g., the American Bible Society) and collegia (e.g., the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International). Another pervasive American pattern is the congregational model of local church organization, whether or not sanctioned by the hierarchy (Silver 1990; Warner 1993).

Long-term centralization and bureaucratization characterize much of organizational life in modern societies (Powell and DiMaggio 1991), but the institutional history of U.S. religion is better seen as an alternation of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies.

The centripetal tendency comprises bureaucratization and professionalization of denominational and ecumenical staffs, where material and especially human resources flow upward toward headquarters and greater attention is paid to edicts of the center, whether or not such a flow is legitimated by the respective religious doctrines. In the history of mainline Protestantism from the Civil War to the Vietnam War, centripetal processes produced denominational bureaucracies and ecumenical agencies (notably the National Council of Churches) and tended to substitute professional expertise and political ideology for religious orthodoxy as a source of organizational power (Hadden 1969; Pratt 1972; Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983, chap. 2; Wuthnow 1988; Ammerman 1990; Chaves 1991*b;* Olson and Carroll 1992). At its height in the first half of this century, centripetalism in mainline Protestantism took the form of what felt like, to both its own fiduciaries and excluded minorities, a protected establishment (Hutchison 1989); the recent erosion of this "establishment" centripetalism is interpreted by some participants as the long-delayed process of secularization predicted by the older paradigm. One result of this temporary establishment was that, for a generation, mainline Protestant leaders were in general more liberal than their laity

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(Hadden 1969; Hoge 1976; Takayama 1980; Wood 1981; Warner 1988). More recently, the centripetal flow in mainline Protestantism has ebbed, indeed reversed, as denominational and ecumenical budgets have been slashed and symbolically significant mainline headquarters have been moved from New York to places like Cleveland and Louisville (McKinney and Roof 1990). Undoubtedly, the most influential attempt to delineate recent centrifugal processes is found in Robert Wuthnow's (1988) chapter on "the declining significance of denominationalism," which analyzes both the blurring of individual denominational identities and the weakening of denominational organizations. Wuthnow's evidence suggests that since World War II denominations have become less distinct from each other but more diverse within themselves in member attitudes and demographics. For instance, the old nominal-level variable "Catholic-Protestant" has ceased to have predictive power for most sociological studies of individual beliefs and behavior and is instead replaced by frequency of church attendance. Wuthnow documents declining interdenominational antagonism and increasing cross-denominational intermarriage and membership switching. Perhaps because of the success of ecumenism, denominational loyalties have declined and church shopping has increased. In important mainline Protestant bodies, fewer clergy confine their training to their denominational seminaries, and local churches send a declining share of their resources to organizational headquarters.

Wuthnow intends none of this to say that religious boundaries have disappeared or that religion has no further power as a sociological variable. The social centrifuge, as FitzGerald (1986) would have it, not only spins things out from the center but also reshuffles them into new combinations. Wuthnow's (1988) "restructuring" spotlights an organizational shift along a new cultural fault line of American religion, comparable to that which took place early in the 19th century (see Wuthnow 1988, p. xiv). Wuthnow sees denominations fading relative to nationwide special purpose groups on each side of the divide between religious "left" and "right" (see also Liebman and Wuthnow 1983; Roof and McKinney 1987; Diamond 1989; Jorstad 1990; Hunter 1991). On the left are such organizations as People for the American Way, Witness for Peace, and Clergy and Laity Concerned; on the right are the Moral Majority, Focus on the Family, and Religious Roundtable.

Another centrifugal conceptualization is "de facto congregationalism" (Warner 1992), that is, labeling an institutionalized bias of American religious life toward affectively significant associations under local and lay control, beginning with observations of differences between congregations within the same denomination (Warner 1983, 1988; see also Carroll and Roozen 1990). De facto congregationalism implies that the local religious community is in fact constituted by those who assemble together

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(which is the etymological root of "congregation") rather than by the geographic units into which higher church authorities divide their constituents, which is what "parishes" historically are. Since Vatican II, the Catholic church seems to be quietly relaxing the geographic parish concept of local church affiliation in the direction of the more cultural gathered-congregation concept, accommodating itself to members' cultural values. Music, architecture, preaching, liturgy, and sexual orientation are thus joining language and national origin as principles of intra-Catholic differentiation (Warner 1992; Christiano 1991). The historian Jay Dolan indicates that Catholic de facto congregationalism has deep roots in America. "The post–Vatican II era has rightly been called the age of the emerging laity, but history reminds us quite clearly that, even in the brief past of Catholic America, lay people at one time had a major responsibility for the growth and development of the local church" (Dolan 1985, p. 192; see also Smith 1971).

The normative congregationalism of Judaism has long facilitated adaptability, and at the present time it is women who are causing the greatest changes in that ancient tradition by claiming professional opportunities as cantors and rabbis and demanding that they ought to be counted as members of the minyan for prayer. The resulting adaptations include ordination for women in Reform and Conservative branches, the synagogue reform movement known as Egalitarian Minyan, and the house-based groups known as Havurot (Wertheimer 1989, pp. 96, 104, 129–34, 136, 141, 154–57; Prell 1989). Beginning in the middle of the 19th century, an earlier congregationally based innovation was mixed gender, or "family," seating (Sarna 1987).

Congregational patterns seem to be emerging among non-Christian religious groups. Among immigrant Muslims, the mosque, established in Islamic countries as a place for prayer, has become an educational and service center to meet the needs of the Muslim community, a congregation, in other words, with adult classes, potlucks, and coffee hours. The imam, who, according to Sunni Islamic practice, is simply the prayer leader, has become in America a religious professional who celebrates marriages, counsels families, visits the sick, conducts funerals, and represents his people among the local clergy, modeling himself in the process on pastors, priests, and rabbis (for details, see Chazanov 1991; Denny 1987; Fenton 1988, pp. 187–97; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Waugh 1992; see also Kashima [1977] on Japanese-origin Buddhists and Fenton [1988] on Hindus).

The adaptability of religion in the United States does not mimic liberal democracy or necessarily bring "progress." American religious institutions respond to both consumer demands and supplier initiatives. Today, many lay people make claims in the name of democratic and, increas-

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ingly, feminist values that are discovered by insiders to reside in the religious tradition itself; one result is such innovations as Egalitarian Minyan. But other democratic tendencies tend to be theologically conservative: the Christian charismatic movement, in which individuals feel themselves to be directly in touch with the deity, and evangelicalism, whose tradition of Biblical literalism and literacy mean that the ultimate charter of the group is at the disposal of any member (McGuire 1982; Neitz 1987; Warner 1988; Bender 1991). Market incentives induce religious elites to maximize the appeal of their organizations to potential constituencies, and one result is entrepreneurial but authoritarian religious institutions—for example, fundamentalist missions to Hispanics (e.g., Montoya 1987) and Buddhist centers catering to European-American converts (Fields 1991, 1992; Preston 1988).

While in medieval Europe there was only one "the" Church, religion in America has taken many forms, denominational and congregational among them. Since the new paradigm recognizes the historic popularity of American religion, it is more generous than the old paradigm in crediting such forms as genuinely religious.

V. INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP EMPOWERMENT

The older paradigm expects religion to be increasingly privatized and invisible when it is not generalized (see Sec. I above). Moreover, those most interested in promoting social change, scholars affiliated with the left, have been long disinclined to think that religion could play a positive role from the point of view of their values (Hannigan 1991, pp. 317–18; Fields 1982). Thus, the role of religion in social change has been widely overlooked.

Yet religious involvement in the United States has historically been one way that groups have improved their lot. The 1960s would not have been the same without American churches, and Aldon Morris (1984, p. 4) reminds us that "the black church functioned as the institutional center of the modern civil rights movement." Nor would the outspoken moral conservatism of the 1980s have been the same without churches. The Moral Majority was mobilized by entrepreneurial pastors of local churches, largely independent Baptists, who represented not an establishment, but an insurgency (Liebman 1983, p. 72; see also Guth 1983; Ammerman 1990). But moral conservatives are not the only recent players, since Sanctuary, the movement challenging U.S. immigration policies toward central American refugees, is also "firmly rooted in religious groups" (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991, p. 1003; see also Matters 1992).

Remarkably, the gay liberation movement is itself a practitioner of the art of church-based mobilization. Troy Perry, some of his allies in the

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gay rights movement, and his severest conservative critics all credit the Metropolitan Community Church with being the organizational center of the attempt to legitimate gay culture in the United States (Perry and Swicegood 1990, chaps. 9–10; Humphreys 1972, pp. 149–53; Rueda 1982, pp. 270–96). Dennis Altman, a radical theoretician of the gay movement, observes that "in many places the church is the only form of the gay movement that exists," and he characterizes Perry as "perhaps the most charismatic leader yet produced by the American gay movement" (Altman 1982, pp. 123, 27).

That churches can play this empowering role is due in part to the pluralism that Christian ethicists deplore and the old paradigm misconstrues, which is embodied in the widely cited observation that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of American life. The obverse of this unpleasant truth is that any group can have its own church. Churches, synagogues, mosques, and the like, as human institutions dedicated to spiritual matters, also inherently have access to the worldly; they combine the symbolic and the material, the cultural and the structural, group morale and social networks. Insofar as a subordinated group requires for its emancipation access to financial and social resources, churches in the United States are a convenient and legitimate means of organization, and in some cases—the classic example may be found among African-Americans—they may be the only such means available. "Churches provided the [civil rights] movement with an organized mass base; a leadership of clergymen largely economically independent of the larger white society and skilled in the art of managing people and resources; an institutionalized financial base through which protest was financed; and meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle" (Morris 1984, p. 4). Jesse Jackson recently testified that "church was like my laboratory, my first actual public stage, where I began to develop and practice my speaking powers" (as quoted in Frady 1992, p. 59). Empowerment is partly a function of pluralistic social organization.

But the special potency of religious institutions comes from answers they give to a group's need for faith in the justice of their cause and the inevitability of triumph. Such faith depends on the conviction, misleadingly called "other-worldliness," of the existence of a religious reality. If one assumes a sacred/secular dichotomy, supernatural beliefs can seem at best irrelevant to this-worldly action, antagonistic at worst (cf. Fields 1982; Hannigan 1991). In this view, shared by many social scientists and some liberation theologians, the most progressive religions must be the most demythologized; thus, for their own good, oppressed groups must slough off their superstitions. But on the model of the African-American experience, where sacred and secular are inextricable, the new paradigm

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expects otherwise. To insist that rebels be iconoclasts is to deprive them of one source of their courage.

Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya state, in their recent comprehensive study of the black church, that "other-worldly religious transcendence can be related dialectically to the motivation, discipline, and courage needed for this-worldly political action" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, p. 234). Based on a textual analysis of spoken sermons, Bruce Rosenberg writes that African-American preachers know that there are "sacred texts that cannot be altered. . . . David must always slay Goliath, Christ is always the Son of God, and always in the beginning God makes the heaven and the earth" (Rosenberg 1988, p. 145). Pastor James Henry Harris adds, "Black folk expect the preacher to reassure them of God's power, not to question or doubt it. They expect the pastor to help them cope with joblessness, poverty and discrimination by transforming their despair into hope" (Harris 1990, p. 599). As Garry Wills puts it, "Hope welling up from the darkest places remains the miracle of African-American Christianity" (Wills 1990, p. 204). Thus numerous empirical studies attest that the black church is historically *both* theologically conservative *and* a resource for social change; it contributes *both* to group solidarity *and* personal well-being (Ellison 1991). African-Americans who leave the church in disgust in effect distance themselves from the black community and its struggle as much as from religion (Sherkat and Ellison 1991).

Other communities have manifested the power of combining autonomous organization with theologically conservative beliefs and practices. Dwight Billings's theory of "religion as opposition" argues that among Appalachian coal miners in Holiness and Baptist congregations independent of company control, "the repetition of collective symbols and their ritualized expression in sermons, prayers, and group singing helped to sustain miners' commitment to the sacred cause of unionism and solidarity" (Billings 1990, p. 20). By segregating themselves into a denomination, the members of the Metropolitan Community Church are able both to organize their own ministries and to celebrate Troy Perry's pentecostally inspired conviction that he was created gay by a beneficent personal God (Perry 1972, p. 111; Perry and Swicegood 1990, p. 30; Warner 1989). Although the analyst must in each case elucidate the mechanisms by which supernatural religion facilitates social strength, experience teaches us to look for such a link.

Thus it is to be expected that the empowerment functions of religion are latent. At an individual level, those who seek well-being in religion tend not to find it; those who gain well-being from religion are not those who seek it (Althauser 1990). At a communal level, the New Religious Right of the early 1980s harnessed individual religious convictions to

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political ends, but the process did not work in the other direction, that is, individual political ends did not take religious forms. Those who watched the politicized TV preachers were more interested in their religious than political messages (Shupe and Stacey 1982). Something similar is true of African-American religion: Wilcox and Gomez (1990) argue on the basis of data from the 1979–80 National Survey of Black Americans that the significant effect of religion on political participation and political attitudes is indirect and is mediated through the contribution of religion to group identification. In other words, political empowerment appears to be a by-product of religion, not its manifest goal (see also Sherkat and Ellison 1991).

Therefore, although we can notice stirrings of collective public participation stemming from the religious institutions of new immigrants in the United States, it would be grossly premature to test the political empowerment hypothesis on their current level of outspokenness. As Lincoln and Mamiya observe, in reference to the black church and political action, "Both forms of protest and electoral politics are only made possible by the *prior* foundation of community building activity" (1990, p. 199; emphasis added). Studies of conservative Protestants, who seemed to have emerged out of nowhere in the 1970s (cf. Herberg 1960, p. 123), reveal that their vociferousness was preceded by generations of institution building away from the attention of the broader public (Brereton 1991; Carpenter 1980; Marsden 1987).

The role of religious organizations for the empowerment of women presents a rich test case for the new paradigm. Given the role of religion in the construction and maintenance of patriarchy, it is no surprise that, with few exceptions, the more an American woman identifies with feminism, the less she identifies with organized religion (Wuthnow 1988, pp. 226–30). Yet it is also true that, by nearly any measure, American women are more involved in religion than their male counterparts—more likely than men to attend church, to read the Bible, to pray, to say that religion is salient to their lives, and less likely to profess nonbelief (Wuthnow 1988; Wuthnow and Lehrman 1990). Some theoretical approaches see women's religiosity as so much false consciousness, an extension of patriarchal control. Those oriented to the new paradigm, however, are inclined to agree with feminist theories that women's cultures—whether or not feminist (Cott 1978, 1989)—represent women's attempts to make the best of their historical circumstances (Kandiyoti 1988), and they have learned to look to U.S. social history for evidence.

The mid-19th-century social movement for "moral reform," arguably the first public social space for American women as a whole and, in turn, the organizational matrix out of which first-wave feminism emerged, was a direct outgrowth of the evangelical Second Great Awakening. During

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that era, roughly the first third of the 19th century in the United States, the modern gender order of "separate spheres" was developed,[9] which in turn ruled relations between the sexes until only a generation ago. As social organization in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War moved away from home-centered production toward the differentiation of industrial production and family consumption, the vocational education of young men no longer took place in apprenticeships at their fathers' side, and American Protestant women joined with their pastors to construct an essentialist doctrine of womanhood as custodian of culture and protector of morality. Business and politics were men's business, but culture and morality were spheres belonging to women. Seeing that their interests and values were distinct from those of men, women soon came together in local, regional, and national associations for the promotion of "moral reform." Insisting that home was woman's place, they did not limit woman's place to the home but also opened a public arena of women's action (Cott 1977; Ryan 1979, 1981; Epstein 1981; Smith-Rosenberg 1985).

The lesson for the new paradigm is pointed. The very pluralism of American religion that gives it power to promote group solidarity also makes it the more likely that the voices of those subordinated within the group are silenced. If the religious community simply mirrors the local patriarchy (or the local gerontocracy), women (or young people) will have reason to escape it (Gilkes 1985; Burdick 1990; Billings 1990). Yet insofar as the relationship between domestic and religious institutions is orthogonal—that is to say as long as there is a structural church-family differentiation—"institutional contradiction" (Friedland and Alford 1981) can allow women to play one patriarchal institution against another. Women's associations provide such differentiation. "Using religion to develop extra-domestic roles, [women] created powerful local and nationwide single-sex organizations expressive of women's particular angers, anxieties, and demands" (Smith-Rosenberg 1985, p. 142).

Successors to moral reform organizations provided avenues of women's influence in mainline Protestantism until a generation ago, when, in a program of gender desegregation and ecumenism, they were absorbed into denominational agencies (Brereton 1989) at about the same time that openings accelerated for women in seminary education and mainline Protestant and liberal Jewish ordination (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Wertheimer 1989, pp. 104, 130–34, 141). Thus, although ordained women's career opportunities are not equal to men's, it is probably no

[9] The nuclear family with a division of labor into men's and women's spheres is historically "modern," not, despite the rhetoric of both reactionaries and feminists, "traditional" (see Stacey 1990, chap. 1).

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accident that among Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Jews, there is no inverse correlation between feminist consciousness and women's religious participation (Wuthnow 1988, pp. 229–30).

Yet with only the minimal organizational leverage of being extrafamilial, religion has long provided moral leverage to American women when other power resources were lacking. Among Catholics in the years between the Depression and the 1960s, devotion to Saint Jude led women to feel "empowered in new ways. They broke off relationships with 'mean' boyfriends [and] rejected unwanted medical treatments" (Orsi 1991, p. 159; see also McGuire 1982, pp. 179–82; Neitz 1990, pp. 101–4). Among Pentecostals in rural Missouri, "religious life provided the *only* opportunity for young girls to leave home and travel. . . . Young girls who could go virtually nowhere else could hardly wait to don their best dresses and hurry down to the tent" (Lawless 1988, pp. 73, 75; see also Lawless 1983). In today's neo-evangelical and charismatic movements, women often convert before their husbands do; in this they are like their sisters of the Second Great Awakening and today's Latin American evangelicals, who gain the moral leverage that comes with entering the religious community of their own volition (Warner 1988, pp. 118–27, 143–45, 292–93; Ryan 1981; Brusco 1986). Precisely because of the power of its God, Pentecostalism gives some women opportunities as religious entrepreneurs (Lawless 1988; Kwilecki 1987).

Women committed to marriage and motherhood find moral support and interpersonal leverage in many evangelical and charismatic fellowships, in which relational values and androgynous images of God are increasingly endorsed (Hunter and Stehlin 1987; Neitz 1987, pp. 149–50). In a modern Orthodox synagogue, Lynn Davidman observed that "one of the aspects of family life in this Orthodox community that was highlighted by several women was that the men seemed to be involved in child care, both within the synagogue and outside of it" (Davidman 1991, p. 117). On the basis of field research with "postfeminist" converts to evangelicalism, Stacey and Gerard (1990, pp. 111–12) write that such women's "turn to evangelicalism represents . . . a strategy that refuses to forfeit, and even builds upon, the feminist critique of men and the 'traditional' family," and provides them with "effective strategies for reshaping husbands in their own image."

Proponents of both the newer paradigm (Iannaccone and Miles 1990) and the older one (Hunter and Stehlin 1987) have recognized that much of contemporary conservative religion in the United States, particularly evangelicalism and neo-Pentecostalism, has been affected by feminism, which indeed is a fact that the public needs to know (see Stacey 1990). But this fact can be interpreted as representing the capitulation of religion to secular currents—as ultraconservatives, radicals, and the older para-

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digm are inclined to see it—or as a mobilization of latent feminist currents in religion itself—a view consistent with much recent historical research. For example, the stringent patriarchy of contemporary Protestant fundamentalism, which the new evangelicals are relaxing, the dictum that no woman may hold authority over any man, far from being "traditional," was itself a turn-of-the-century reaction against feminist currents in 19th-century evangelicalism (Caldwell 1991; Barfoot and Sheppard 1980; Zikmund 1979).

Ideological leverage inheres in religion (Fields 1982). Jewish and Christian feminists have good reason to see adumbrations of their ideals lying near the heart of the traditions they wish to alter, for example in the Gospel testimonies that the Resurrection was first revealed to Jesus' female disciples. The affinity of Korean-Americans for Christianity, and more particularly for Presbyterianism, is partly due to the heroic role played by Presbyterian missionaries and converts in Korea's turn-of-the-century struggle against Japanese colonialism (Kitano and Daniels 1988, pp. 113–14). Troy Perry's moment of inspiration to establish the Metropolitan Community Church came when he realized that the God whom he had not ceased to love and fear wanted Perry to take his gospel of innate homosexuality into the gay community (Perry 1972, p. 8; Perry and Swicegood 1990, p. 30).

VI. THE "NEW" VOLUNTARISM

The preceding four sections have developed four distinctive and perennial aspects of American religion which, under different rubrics, have received the attention of contemporary researchers and which, considered theoretically, pose an alternative to the older paradigm. With appropriate complications and qualifications, religion in the United States is and has long been (*a*) disestablished, (*b*) culturally pluralistic, (*c*) structurally adaptable, and (*d*) empowering. My final topic is the recent (i.e., post-1960s) complex of individualized religious identification—including conversion to new religious identities and the assertive embrace of old ones, as well as apostasy on a wide scale—that I will follow Roof and McKinney (1987) in referring to as "the new voluntarism."[10] The contemporary

[10] The concept of "voluntarism," as used here, stands in the tradition of American religious studies rather than sociological theory. Sometimes called "voluntaryism" (Ahlstrom 1972, pp. 382–83), the religious studies concept refers to the *concrete* institutional facts of separation of church and state and religious freedom in the postrevolutionary United States and the consequent need for churches to rely on persuasion rather than coercion for their support (Littel 1962; Mead 1963). Such "voluntarism," strange and remarkable to Europeans, "became a matter of course to Americans" (Rowe 1924, p. 53), and over time it evolved into the religious system portrayed here.

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scene seems sufficiently discontinuous with the patterns described more than a generation ago by Herberg (1960) to raise the question whether the American institutional complex portrayed in this article persists or whether, as the older paradigm would have it, we are witnessing the latest stage of "secularization."

Consider these figures: between one-third and one-half of those responding to polls have changed denominations in their lives, some of them only to switch back to the affiliation of their youth, more to an adjoining denomination, but many to religious disaffiliation (Hadaway and Marler 1991*a;* Roof and McKinney 1987, p. 165). One-fifth of those raised Catholic no longer identify with that faith, and they include an estimated one million Hispanics who have gone over to Protestantism within the past 15 years (Greeley 1990, p. 120). The proportion of Americans claiming no religious preference (the people sociologists of religion call "nones") has jumped from 2%–3% a generation ago to 7%–9% today. Moreover, with the exception of African-Americans, nones do not as a whole occupy alienated or marginal status in U.S. society (Glenn 1987; Roof and McKinney 1987, p. 99; Kosmin, Keysar, and Lerer 1991). Probably as radical as switching—and certainly as unsettling to loved ones—are such surprises as the Pentecostal spirit baptism of lifelong devoted Catholics (Neitz 1987), born-again evangelicalism among mainline Protestants (Warner 1988), and the "return" of nominal Jews to an orthodoxy they had never before embraced (Davidman 1991; Kaufman 1991).

The voluntarism is attitudinal as well. Gallup (1988, p. 3) reports that 80% of Americans agree that the individual "should arrive at his or her religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue" (see also Roof and McKinney 1987, p. 57). Roof (1993) and his associates have tracked accounts of spiritual trajectories of "baby boomers" away from and back toward conventional religion and many syncretic alternatives. Phillip Hammond (1988, p. 5) speaks of a growing shift from "collective-expressive" church membership in the past to "individual-expressive" religious involvement—voluntary and independent of other social ties—

The "voluntarism" of sociological theory, particularly associated with the early work of Talcott Parsons, concerns the *analytic* question of the categories needed for the analysis of individual action (Alexander 1982). Insofar as Parsons, himself raised a liberal Protestant, conceived modern social order to minimize coercion, the two concepts were no doubt related in his mind. Moreover, since the "new voluntarism" complex conceptualizes an additional, perhaps temporary, movement toward individualism in religion (referred to below as a disjunction of culture and social structure), the phenomena it delimits are closer still (albeit not identical) to the theorists' concerns. The new voluntarism has also been called the "third disestablishment" (Roof and McKinney 1987; Hammond 1992).

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today (see also Hammond 1992). Samuel Heilman (1990, p. 195) writes that, "for the contemporary Jew, corporate identity diminishes and ascription gives way to achievement and autonomy as the most powerful determinants of identity." Elsewhere I have written that evangelical Protestantism upholds an ethic of achieved rather than ascribed recruitment (Warner 1988, pp. 52–53, 72, 292–93). It is true by definition that membership in a new denomination such as the Metropolitan Community Church is an achieved status; this is true as well as for the Vineyard, one of several conservative Christian protodenominations emerging out of the late 1960s Jesus movement and appealing primarily to baby boomers (Perrin and Mauss 1991). These are inherently churches of converts.

In other words, both religious disaffiliation and religious conservatism benefit from "achieved" religiosity; the United States has seen both religious revival and apostasy (Chaves 1989; Roozen, McKinney, and Thompson 1990). Taken-for-granted, traditional religion is passé. Born-again, return-to-the-fold neotraditional religion is all the rage.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985) have most eloquently lamented these individualistic trends. Although they recognize that Americans, no matter how individualistic, seek out like-minded others, they fear that the resulting associations are only "lifestyle enclaves," a term they intend to connote shallowness and mutual narcissism. "When we hear such phrases as 'the gay community' or 'the Japanese-American community,' we need to know a great deal before we can decide the degree to which they are genuine communities and the degree to which they are lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 74–75). These authors worry about a culture that encourages Americans "to choose the groups with which [they] want to identify" (p. 154), and they propose instead, in the spirit of the older paradigm, that "there is a givenness about the community and the tradition. They are not normally a matter of individual choice" (p. 227).

I do not wish to dismiss the concerns of Bellah and his colleagues, but there is considerable evidence that religious switchers are morally serious. Kristin Luker reports that nearly 20% of the pro-life activists in her study of the abortion controversy were "converts to Catholicism, people who have actively chosen to follow a given religious faith, in striking contrast to the pro-choice people, who have actively chosen not to follow any" (Luker 1984, p. 196). Evidence that FitzGerald's social centrifuge contributes to moral coherence is presented in Roof and McKinney's analysis of 1972–84 General Social Survey data, which indicates that Protestants' inveterate switching of denominations is increasingly motivated by moral culture instead of socioeconomic status. Those shifting their allegiance to the liberal Protestant denominations like the Episcopal and the Presbyterian churches are more liberal on matters of women's rights and racial

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justice than those raised in these communities, while those gravitating to conservative bodies like the Southern Baptists and the Nazarenes are accentuating those bodies' conservatism on sexual morality (Roof and McKinney 1987, pp. 218, 220, 222).[11] Switching is decreasingly likely to mirror upward social mobility and to represent instead genuine religious change; "switchers are, in a very real sense, converts" (Hadaway and Marler 1991*a*, p. 22). Protestant switching is not entropic (Sullins 1992).

Switching includes the disaffiliation of dropouts, to be sure, but for those who shift from one faith community to another it also means greater religious involvement—contributing money to the church, frequent prayer and Bible reading, being "born again," being in agreement with the moral culture of their newfound reference group, searching for more meaning in religious participation (Roof and McKinney 1987; Hadaway and Marler 1991*a;* Mauss and Perrin 1991). Conservative churches that expect high levels of involvement are organizational beneficiaries of such switching patterns (Mauss and Perrin 1991; Roof and McKinney 1987, pp. 177–79), but liberal churches that take strong stands and make strong demands can attract newcomers as well (Matters 1992; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991).

We also know that irreligion in the United States replicates itself across generations less effectively than active religious preference. Though the proportion of "nones" has roughly tripled since the 1950s, nones tend to generate additional nones less efficiently than Protestants, Catholics, and Jews do their own kind (Roof and McKinney 1987, p. 169). This may be in part because, in a religious society such as ours, nones are surrounded more by religion than by irreligion. Men are more likely to lack religion than women, but religiously indifferent fathers are particularly poor in passing on their indifference to their offspring. Moreover, the *rate* of disaffiliation is declining. Disaffiliation was common in the young adulthood of baby boomers but is less so more recently (Hadaway and Marler 1991*a*). Religion is still a prime idiom by which Americans identify themselves.

Yet religion need not represent something in which people are primordially rooted. Religious affiliation in the United States is not tribal. The freedom of Americans to choose with whom they will congregate in service of their most basic values is a freedom not to "pass" as biological

[11] Roof and McKinney (1987) measure mobility of identifiers, not members, across "families" of denominations, not denominations per se. Thus, for their research purposes, Presbyterians are the same as Episcopalians since both are "liberal Protestants," Lutherans and Methodists are alike "moderate Protestants," and Southern Baptists and Pentecostals are "conservative Protestants." The cultural sorting they map, therefore, is ambiguous with respect to the hypothesis of the declining significance of denominational identities, strictly speaking.

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kin but to partake as full legatees of cultural traditions that add depth and richness to the association. Literate converts to a religion of the book have immediate access to its communal memory. The religious groups that seem to work best in cosmopolitan America are those that recognize the mobility of their members and bring them into contact with great cultural traditions by incessantly and elaborately recounting the founding narrative (Warner 1988, chap. 9).

It is helpful in this regard to think of religion in the United States as being subject to the decoupling of culture and social structure (Bell 1976). Religiously relevant statuses are increasingly random with respect to the standard categories of social structure (Caplow 1985; Hammond 1992; Hadaway and Marler 1991*a*). Thus the new paradigm is not surprised by news of people with modern intellectual resources who reject secularity in favor of "Bible-based" Christianity and "observant" Judaism. Susan Rose (1987, p. 255) tells of women in an upstate New York religious commune who "knowingly and willingly stepped down and relinquished their authority and power" because they valued relationships with men. Nancy Ammerman (1987, pp. 26–31, 72–102) studied a fundamentalist church in New England whose members were demographically and educationally clustered slightly on the more privileged side of the surrounding middle-class suburb but who withdrew morally from what they felt to be an alien world. Lynn Davidman (1991, chap. 5) spent time with converts to orthodox Judaism in Manhattan—young, educated, well-employed women who found in traditional religion a legitimation for the families they hoped to create. In each of these studies, religious commitments helped people set and maintain priorities in a time of perceived bewildering choice.

Has American religion become rootless, evanescent, or arbitrary? No. The breakdown of ascription may be welcomed when, like members of the Metropolitan Community Church, its beneficiaries are convinced that they have been freed to acknowledge their true nature. What the new religious voluntarism amounts to is a centrifugal process, sorting elemental qualities on the basis of which identities are constructed. The evangelical Presbyterians I met in Mendocino, California, had in common not their denominational or educational backgrounds but their histories as migrants to an idealized small town. Their pastor's preaching united their ideological neoparochialism with the theology he had learned in seminary so as to give their common narrative deep resonance (Warner 1988, pp. 86–87, 205–8). In this way, the breakdown of ascriptive ties to religion can enhance, rather than reduce, the elemental nature that believers attribute to their experiences. From this point of view, social ascription that denies one's true being is seen as arbitrary, while a newfound religion is self-affirming.

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I do not wish to overestimate either the extent or the appeal of religious mobility, nor ignore the pain that often accompanies it. Once having chosen a religious home, one is supposed to be and likely to be loyal, and it is probably true that someone dissatisfied with her or his church is as likely to turn away from churches altogether as to seek a church more conformable to personal needs, at least in the short run. There is a norm to the effect that shopping for religion is wrong, and talk of a "religious market" is highly offensive to many people, particularly when it suggests an instrumental attitude toward religion, or ecclesiastical social climbing. Such a norm is no doubt functional for the stability of religious organizations.

What facilitates religious mobility despite such a norm and despite investments in religious capital (Iannaccone 1990) are several social facts, including aggressive proselytization; the emphasis on loyalty to God over institutions that is part of the evangelical—and hence mainline Protestant—tradition; members' intermittent involvement, such that some who are formally church members may not feel committed and therefore not disloyal when they leave; life-cycle events such as marriage, particularly religious intermarriage; children, for whom one may want to choose an appropriate Sunday school; and geographic mobility. Geographic mobility requires people to choose a church. Since denominations are not homogeneous, the church of one's former denomination in the new location may not "feel right." Denominations themselves change, and the switcher may well perceive that it is not she or he who left the fold.

More research is needed on the question whether rates of religious mobility have recently increased over those prevalent in the 1950s, as has been argued by Roof and McKinney (1987) among others. Yet it should be borne in mind that religious individualism and denomination switching characterized earlier periods of U.S. history, particularly the "awakenings" that took place around 1800–30 and 1890–1920.[12] It was in the former period that the numerical dominance of what later came to be called the liberal Protestant denominations was eclipsed by the surge of the evangelical Methodists and Baptists. The latter period saw the rise of the Holiness, Pentecostal, and fundamentalist movements, the recent visibility of which has so greatly altered the profile of late 20th-century U.S. religion.

Like the present, these were times of massive geographical and social mobility, when individuals could not effectively follow in the footsteps of their parents but had to "start over" for themselves (FitzGerald 1986, pp. 383–414; see Ryan [1981] for the earlier period and Thomas [1989] for the later). Large numbers heeded the messages of religious innovators,

[12] The dates are from McLoughlin (1978).

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and from these times of intense, revivalistic competition new institutions were born, institutions with the potential to solidify into powerful organizations and even rigid bureaucracies (Pritchard 1984; Barfoot and Sheppard 1980; Poloma 1989). Before entertaining the hypothesis that a new religious order prevails in the United States, it is worthwhile to mine the analogies between the present and the American past.

Such an analogy occurred to the anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell as she looked back on her study of the early 1970s Egalitarian Minyan in Los Angeles. Prell (1989, p. 27) "came to understand the strong parallels between Minyan members and their parents' generation's constructions of Judaism." "I was struck," she writes, "by what these parallels revealed about American religion, namely that religion had been voluntaristic in America ever since immigrants arrived. What appeared, for example, as a counterculture rebellion had its roots deep in immigrants' attempts to maintain their Judaism within American society."

CONCLUSION: THE NEW PARADIGM AND THE AGENDA OF THE FIELD

It is conventional to conclude a paper with a call for more research, but this article—both a research review and a proposal—is such a call. I have highlighted recent work of many scholars, interpreting their findings as only loosely bound (if at all) to the older paradigm. My proposal claims that recent work is more compellingly framed in terms of the newer paradigm. The nascent paradigm itself is the self-conscious project of only a few scholars (without anyone's permission having been asked, it is reasonable in this connection to name Theodore Caplow, Roger Finke, Andrew Greeley, Nathan Hatch, Laurence Iannaccone, Mary Jo Neitz, Daniel Olson, and Rodney Stark), and they do not form a solidary group but a loose school of thought with a common focus on the distinctive institutional parameters of the U.S. religious system—particularly the combination of disestablishment and institutional vitality—as the analytic norm for the study of religion.

Some scholars who are aware of the theoretical ambitions of the new paradigm have spoken out in opposition to it (e.g., Lechner 1991; Breault 1989*a*), but most scholars in the field are uninvolved in the debate. Yet my claim here is that, because so much recent research focuses in fact on U.S. religious institutions, there is an immanent direction to the research programs even of those not involved in debates over paradigms. Progress in that direction could be facilitated if, in the work of such persons, the presuppositions of the new paradigm were substituted for the old. If that substitution were widespread, several consequences would ensue:

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Students of religious communities and subcultures would focus more on the building of religious institutions and the role of religion in social mobilization and relatively less on the erection and maintenance of plausibility structures.

Students of religious organization would focus as much on the rise of new religious organizations (e.g., Perrin and Mauss 1991) as the decline of old ones (e.g., Hoge and Roozen 1979), even though data would be intrinsically more difficult to find; those who focus on individuals and organizations would analyze entrepreneurial (Kwilecki 1987; Harrell 1985; Stout 1991) as well as bureaucratic (Chaves 1991*a*) and professional (Charlton 1978; Carroll et al. 1983) religious careers.

Students of social change would investigate the ways in which religion alternatively facilitates and inhibits collective action but would extend their time horizon for these processes to the span of a generation and complicate their models to include indirect effects of group solidarity.

Students of the intersection of biography and social history would assume that individual religious affiliation is not an ascriptive identity set for life but something that can be affirmed and later denied, or vice versa.

The paradigm debate does not crucially impinge on all areas of research in the field; in particular, studies of religious cultures and religious social psychology are less centrally implicated in a paradigm shift whose level of analysis is organizational. Nonetheless it is a radical decision to choose to focus on the European experience of religious monopoly or on the American case of religious cacophony as the analytic norm, or paradigmatic situation, of religion.

Researchers in the field agree that sociology of religion should not be sealed off from the rest of sociology. This article is based on the assumption that the field contributes most when it recognizes that its empirical field constitutes a central institutional sphere of U.S. society. The nonexclusive strategy taken here has been to codify a paradigm adequate to the best-documented case—the United States—both so that researchers on that case can better understand their findings and so that the parameters of the case itself can be identified. Thus there has just begun one critical line of research that attempts to specify the determinants of the American religious system. Is the key to American religious vitality given in Tocqueville's analysis of the historically apolitical stance of most U.S. religious groups, the notion that American religion has largely stayed out of politics? (See, e.g., Caplow 1985.) Or is religious pluralism the key, as Finke and Stark (1988) would have it, the sheer variety of religious choices? Or is it deregulation, the lack of either subsidy or state oversight of religious organizations? (See Greeley 1989, pp. 126–27; Iannaccone 1991; Chaves and Cann 1992.) Comparative institutional research, unburdened of the secularization expectations of the older paradigm, will serve to demystify the concept of American exceptionalism (Tiryakian

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1991). Until that has been accomplished, the exception may well be taken as the rule.

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