

The Cultural Policy Studies Project

January 25, 1996

WHY RELIGION MATTERS: THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE ON SOCIAL STABILITY

INTRODUCTION¹

By extolling freedom of religion in the schools, President Bill Clinton has raised the level of debate on the importance of religion to American life.² The time is ripe for a deeper dialogue on the contribution of religion to the welfare of the nation.

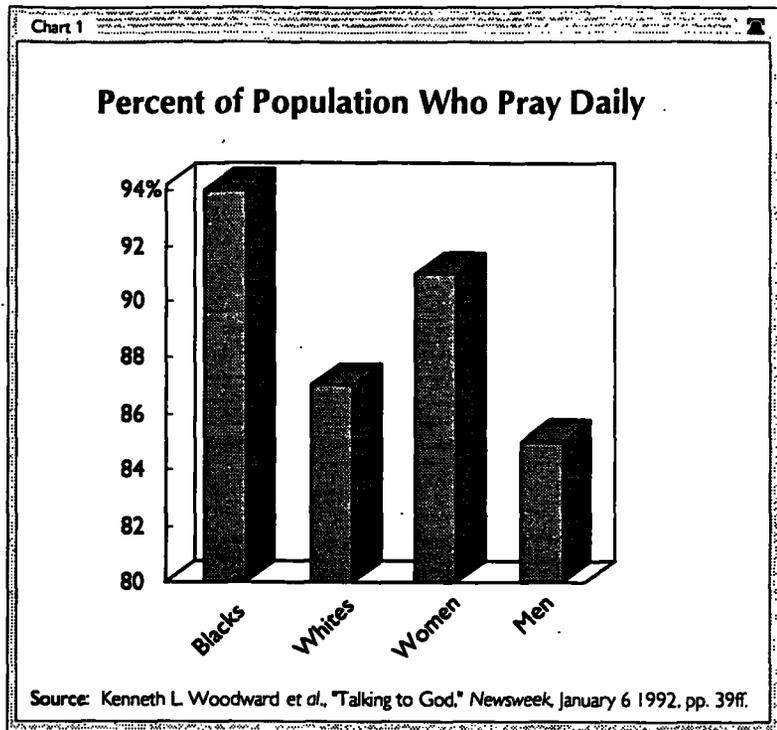
America has always been a religious country. "Its first Christian inhabitants were only too anxious to explain what they were doing and why," explains historian Paul Johnson. "In a way the first American settlers were like the ancient Israelites. They saw themselves as active agents of divine providence."³ Today, he adds, "it is generally accepted that more than half the American people still attend a place of worship over a weekend, an index of religious practice unequaled anywhere in the world, certainly in a great and populous nation."⁴

At the heart of religious practice is prayer: Americans pray even more than they go to church. According to a composite of surveys, 94 percent of blacks, 91 percent of women, 87 percent of whites, and 85 percent of men regard themselves as people who pray regularly. Some 78 percent pray at least once per week, and 57 percent pray daily. Even among

- 1 The author wishes to draw special attention to the major initial source of information on the research done on religion in the social and medical sciences: David B. Larson and Susan S. Larson, "The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health: What Does the Research Show?" (Rockville, Md.: National Institute for Healthcare Research, 1994). David Larson is one of the premier researchers in the field and serves as president of the National Institute for Healthcare Research, as well as adjunct faculty member at the Northwestern University and Duke University Medical Schools.
- 2 Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by the President on Religious Liberty in America at James Madison High School, Vienna, Virginia, July 12, 1995."
- 3 Paul Johnson, "God and the Americans," *Commentary*, January 1995, pp. 25-45.
- 4 *Ibid.*

the 13 percent of the population who call themselves agnostics or atheists, some 20 percent pray daily.⁵

When policymakers consider America's grave social problems, including violent crime and rising illegitimacy, substance abuse, and welfare dependency, they should heed the findings in the professional literature of the social sciences on the positive consequences that flow from the practice of religion.⁶



For example, there is ample evidence that:

- ✓ The strength of the family unit is intertwined with the practice of religion. Churchgoers⁷ are more likely to be married, less likely to be divorced or single, and more likely to manifest high levels of satisfaction in marriage.
- ✓ Church attendance is the most important predictor of marital stability and happiness.
- ✓ The regular practice of religion helps poor persons move out of poverty. Regular church attendance, for example, is particularly instrumental in helping young people to escape the poverty of inner-city life.
- ✓ Religious belief and practice contribute substantially to the formation of personal moral criteria and sound moral judgment.
- ✓ Regular religious practice generally inoculates individuals against a host of social problems, including suicide, drug abuse, out-of-wedlock births, crime, and divorce.
- ✓ The regular practice of religion also encourages such beneficial effects on mental health as less depression (a modern epidemic), more self-esteem, and greater family and marital happiness.

5 Kenneth L. Woodward *et al.*, "Talking to God," *Newsweek*, January 6, 1992, pp. 39ff.

6 Many studies cited herein are 10-20 years old. The need to go back so far reflects the paucity of serious research in the area of religion relative to studies in the other four major institutions: family, education, the economy, and government. In the author's opinion, it also reflects the tension between religion and the social sciences. See "Religion and the Social Sciences," *infra*.

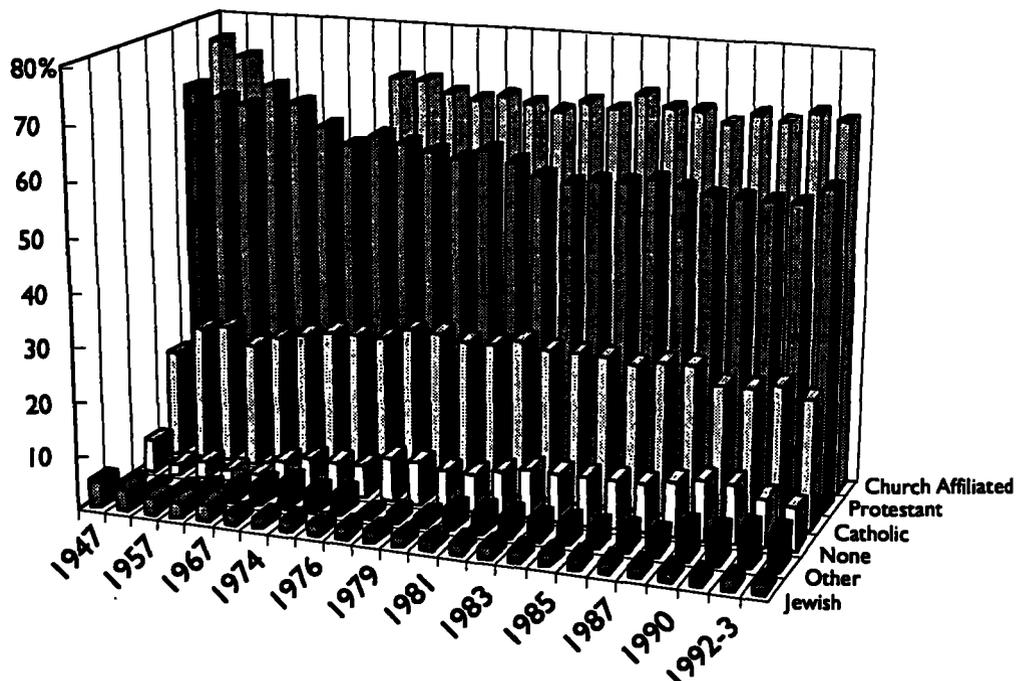
7 Throughout this study, "church" and "churchgoer" are used in the generic sense to indicate church, synagogue, or any other place of worship and an individual attending any such institution.

- ✓ In repairing damage caused by alcoholism, drug addiction, and marital breakdown, religious belief and practice are a major source of strength and recovery.
- ✓ Regular practice of religion is good for personal physical health: It increases longevity, improves one's chances of recovery from illness, and lessens the incidence of many killer diseases.

The overall impact of religious practice is illustrated dramatically in the three most comprehensive systematic reviews of the field.⁸ Some 81 percent of the studies showed the positive benefit of religious practice, 15 percent showed neutral effects, and only 4 percent showed harm.⁹ Each of these systematic reviews indicated more than 80 percent benefit, and none indicated more than 10 percent harm. Even this 10 percent may be explained by

Chart 2

Percent of U.S. Population That is Church-Affiliated



Source: "Religion in America Supplement '95" The Gallup Poll, Princeton Religion Research Center, Princeton, NJ., 1995.

- 8 For social scientists, a "systematic review" is one in which the robustness of the research method is weighted when assessing the quality of the findings reported. Thus, systematic reviews are the most useful way to assess the scientific literature and provide a valid guide to the findings in a particular field.
- 9 Jeff S. Levin and Harold Y. Vanderpool, "Is Frequent Religious Attendance Really Conducive to Better Health?: Towards an Epidemiology of Religion," *Social Science Medicine*, Vol. 24 (1987), pp. 589-600; David B. Larson, Kim A. Sherrill, John S. Lyons, Fred C. Craigie, S. B. Thielman, M. A. Greenwald, and Susan S. Larson, "Dimensions and Valences of Measures of Religious Commitment Found in the American Journal of Psychiatry and the Archives of General Psychiatry: 1978 through 1989," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 149 (1978), pp. 557-559; Fred C. Craigie, Jr., David B. Larson, and Ingrid Y. Liu, "References to Religion in The Journal of Family Practice: Dimensions and Valence of Spirituality," *The Journal of Family Practice*, Vol. 30 (1990), pp. 477-480.

more recent social science insights into “healthy religious practice” and “unhealthy religious practice.”¹⁰ This latter notion will be discussed later—it is seen generally by most Americans of religious faith as a mispractice of religion. Unfortunately, the effects of unhealthy religious practice are used to downplay the generally positive influence of religion.¹¹ This both distorts the true nature of religious belief and practice and causes many policymakers to ignore its positive social consequences.

Religious practice appears to have enormous potential for addressing today’s social problems. As summarized in 1991 by Allen Bergin, professor of psychology at Brigham Young University, considerable evidence indicates that religious involvement reduces “such problems as sexual permissiveness, teen pregnancy, suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, and to some extent deviant and delinquent acts, and increases self esteem, family cohesiveness and general well being....Some religious influences have a modest impact whereas another portion seem like the mental equivalent of nuclear energy....More generally, social scientists are discovering the continuing power of religion to protect the family from the forces that would tear it down.”¹²

Professor Bergin’s summary was echoed two years later by nationally syndicated columnist William Raspberry: “Almost every commentator on the current scene bemoans the increase of violence, lowered ethical standards and loss of civility that mark American society. Is the decline of religious influence part of what is happening to us? Is it not just possible that anti-religious bias masquerading as religious neutrality is costing more than we have been willing to acknowledge?”¹³ Other reviews¹⁴ also list the positive effects of religious belief and practice in reducing such problems as suicide, substance abuse, divorce, and marital dissatisfaction. Such evidence indicates clearly that religious practice contributes significantly to the quality of American life.

Given this evidence,

Congress should:

- ☞ **Begin** a new national debate to help renew the role of religion in American life;
- ☞ **Ask** the General Accounting Office (GAO) to review the evidence on the beneficial effects of religious practice in the relevant social science literature and report its findings to a national commission formed to promote the consideration of religious practice among U.S. citizens;
- ☞ **Fund** federal experiments with school choice that include religiously affiliated schools;

10 See “Religion and the Social Sciences,” *infra*, on the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic religious practice.

11 Thomas Skill, James D. Robinson, John S. Lyons, and David Larson, “The Portrayal of Religion and Spirituality on Fictional Network Television,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (March 1994), pp. 251-267.

12 Allen E. Bergin, “Values and Religious Issues in Psychotherapy and Mental Health,” *The American Psychologist*, Vol. 46 (1991), pp. 394-403, esp. p. 401. Professor Bergin received the American Psychological Association’s top award in 1990.

13 William Raspberry: “Christmas Without Meaning? Must the Religious Make a Secret of Their Beliefs?” *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1993, p. A15.

14 David B. Larson, Susan S. Larson, and John Gartner, “Families, Relationships and Health,” in *Behavior and Medicine*, ed. Danny Wedding (Baltimore: Mosby Year Book Inc., 1990), pp. 135-147.

- ☞ **Pass** a sense-of-the-Congress resolution that data on religious practice are useful for policymakers and researchers as part of the public policy debate; and
- ☞ **Mandate** a census question on religious practice. It violates nobody's freedom of religion for Congress to know the level and intensity of religious practice in America.

The President should:

- ☞ **Appoint** judges who are more sensitive to the role of religion in public life, with the Senate ensuring that such is the case by ascertaining the stand of judges on matters of religion and its relationship to the Constitution;
- ☞ **Direct** the Bureau of the Census to record levels of religious practice in the census for the year 2000 (time is running out for preparation of the census questionnaire); and
- ☞ **Issue** a directive to all federal agencies making clear that cooperation between government entities and the social, medical, and educational services of faith-based organizations does not violate separation of church and state.

The U.S. Supreme Court should:

- ☞ **Review** the decisions in which it has changed the laws of the land by changing commonly held beliefs regarding the Constitution and religion and send to Congress those that should have been the object of legislative action rather than judicial reinterpretation.

America's religious leaders should:

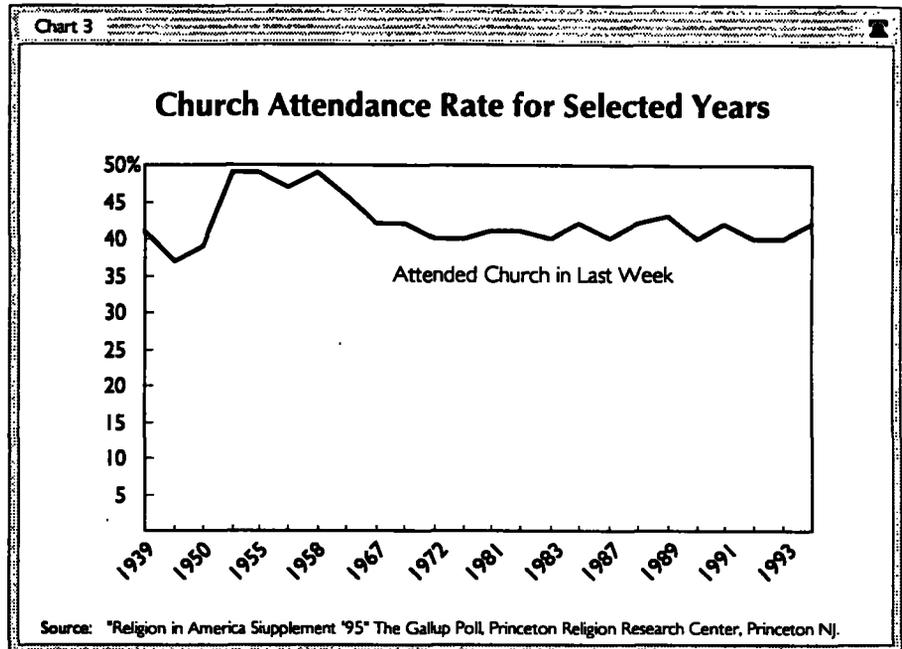
- ☞ **Be much more assertive** in emphasizing the contribution of religion to the health of the nation and in resisting efforts to minimize religion in public discourse;
- ☞ **Make clear** to their congregations that they are contributing not only to their own welfare, but also to the well-being of the nation by their regular attendance at religious worship;
- ☞ **Take special care** of the religious formation of children, especially during the transition period from childhood to adolescence, when they are most likely to lose their religious faith;
- ☞ **Recognize** that the church in the inner city, especially the black church, has a vital role to play in helping its people escape from the degrading culture of inner-city poverty; and
- ☞ **Encourage** education leaders, social scientists, and social policy practitioners to rely more on religious belief and worship to achieve social policy and social work goals.

RELIGION AND HAPPINESS

Ever since Aristotle outlined the goal of a sound civil order in his *Politics*,¹⁵ social and political scientists and social psychologists have been particularly interested in what makes human beings happy. Happy people tend to be productive and law-abiding. They learn well, make good citizens, and are invariably pleasant company. It turns out that the practice of religion has a significant effect on happiness and an overall sense of personal well-being. Religious affiliation and regular church attendance are near the top of the list for most people in explaining their own happiness¹⁶ and serve as good predictors of who is most likely

to have this sense of well-being.¹⁷ Happiness is greater and psychological stress is lower for those who attend religious services regularly.¹⁸ Those pursuing a personal relationship with God tend to have improved relationships with themselves and with others.¹⁹

A large epidemiological study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley in 1971 found that the religiously committed had much less psychological distress than the uncommitted.²⁰ Rodney Stark, now of the University of Washington, found the same in a 1970 study: The higher the level of religious attendance, the less stress suffered when adversity had to be endured.²¹ Similarly, in a longitudinal study of 720 adults conducted by



- 15 *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), Book VIII, "Political Ideal and Educational Principles," Chapters 1, 2, and 3, "The Highest Goal," pp. 279-289.
- 16 B. Beit-Hallami, "Psychology of Religion 1880-1939: The Rise and Fall of a Psychological Movement," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 10 (1974), pp. 84-90.
- 17 Harsha N. Mookherjee, "Effects of Religiosity and Selected Variables on the Perception of Well-Being," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 134, No. 3 (June 1994), pp. 403-405, reporting on a national sample General Social Survey of 1,481 adults aged 18-89.
- 18 Larson and Larson, "The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health," p. 76.
- 19 David O. Moberg, "The Development of Social Indicators of Spiritual Well-Being for Quality of Life Research," in *Spiritual Well-Being: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. David O. Moberg (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979).
- 20 Rodney Stark, "Psychopathology and Religious Commitment," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 12 (1971), pp. 165-176.
- 21 R. W. Williams, D. B. Larson, R. E. Buckler, R. C. Heckman, and C. M. Pyle, "Religion and Psychological Distress in a Community Sample," *Social Science Medicine*, Vol. 32 (1991), pp. 1257-1262.

David Williams of the University of Michigan, regular religious attendance led to much less psychological distress.²²

In 1991, David Larson, adjunct professor at the Northwestern and Duke University Schools of Medicine and president of the National Institute of Healthcare Research, completed a systematic review of studies on religious commitment and personal well-being. He found that the relationship is powerful and positive; overall, psychological functioning improved following a resumption of participation in religious worship for those who had stopped.²³

RELIGION AND FAMILY STABILITY

There is a growing consensus that America needs to pursue policies aimed at re-strengthening the family. The beneficial effects of religious worship on family stability clearly indicate one way to help accomplish this. Professors Darwin L. Thomas and Gwendolyn C. Henry of Brigham Young University's Department of Sociology sum up earlier research²⁴ on the quest by young people for meaning and love: "Research on love clearly indicates that for many, love in the social realm cannot clearly be separated from love that contains a vertical or a divine element.... Young people see love as the central aspect of the meaning of life; they believe that religion is still important in helping form judgments and attitudes."²⁵ Their conclusion: "Family and religious institutions need to be studied simultaneously in our efforts to understand the human condition better."²⁶

"Middletown," one of the century's classic sociological research projects, studied the lives of inhabitants of a typical American town, first in the 1920s and for the third time in the 1980s. Based on the latest round of follow-up research, Howard Bahr and Bruce Chadwick, professors of sociology at Brigham Young University, concluded in 1985 that "There is a relationship between family solidarity—family health if you will—and church affiliation and activity. Middletown [churchgoing] members were more likely to be married, remain married and to be highly satisfied with their marriages and to have more children.... The great divide between marriage status, marriage satisfaction and family size is... between those who identify with a church or denomination and those who do not."²⁷

Four years later, Professor Arland Thornton of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan likewise concluded from a Detroit study of the same relationship that "These data indicate strong intergenerational transmission of religious involvement. Attendance at religious services is also very stable within generations across time."²⁸

22 *Ibid.*

23 David B. Larson and Susan S. Larson, "Does Religious Commitment Make a Clinical Difference in Health?" *Second Opinion*, Vol. 17 (July 1991), pp. 26-40.

24 William V. D'Antonio: "The Family and Religion: Exploring a Changing Relationship," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 19 (1980), pp. 89-104.

25 Darwin L. Thomas and Gwendolyn C. Henry, "The Religion and Family Connection: Increasing Dialogue in the Social Sciences," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47 (May 1985), pp. 369-370.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Howard M. Bahr and Bruce A. Chadwick, "Religion and Family in Middletown, USA," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47 (May 1985), pp. 407-414.

"With striking consistency, the most religious among us [as Americans] place a greater importance on the full range of family and friendship activities," concluded a Connecticut Mutual Life report in 1982.²⁹ A group of Kansas State University professors reached the same conclusion: "Family commitment is indeed a high priority in many American families and it is frequently accompanied by a concomitant factor of religious commitment."³⁰ In yet another study conducted during the 1970s and 1980s, professors Nick Stinnet of the University of Alabama and John DeFrain of the University of Nebraska sought to identify family strengths. From their nationwide surveys of strong families, they found that 84 percent identified religion as an important contributor to the strength of their families.³¹ It should be noted that the same pattern appears to hold for African-American families: Parents who attended church frequently cited the significance of religion in rearing their children and in providing moral guidelines.³²

Marital Satisfaction. Couples with long-lasting marriages indicate that the practice of religion is an important factor in marital happiness. Indeed, David Larson's systematic reviews indicate that church attendance is the most important predictor of marital stability.³³ Others have found the same result.³⁴ Twenty years ago it was first noted that very religious women achieve greater satisfaction in sexual intercourse with their husbands than do moderately religious or non-religious women.³⁵ The *Sex in America* study published in 1995, and conducted by sociologists from the University of Chicago and the State University of New York at Stonybrook, also showed very high sexual satisfaction among "conservative" religious women.³⁶ From the standpoint of contemporary American media culture, this may appear strange or counter-intuitive, but the empirical evidence is consistent.

Divorce and Cohabitation. Regular church attendance is the critical factor in marital stability across denominations and overrides effects of doctrinal teaching on divorce. For instance, black Protestants and white Catholics, who share similarly high church attendance rates, have been shown to have similarly low divorce rates.³⁷ Furthermore, when marital separation occurs, reconciliation rates are higher among regular church attendees, and highest when both spouses have the same high level of church attendance.³⁸ Findings on the

28 Arland Thornton and Donald Camburn, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 51 (August 1989), pp. 641-653.

29 Research and Forecasts Inc., *The Connecticut Mutual Life Report on American Values in the 1980's* (Hartford: Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Co., 1981).

30 C. E. Kennedy, Janet Cleveland, and Walter Schumm, "Family Commitment and Religious Commitment: Parallel Processes." (Manhattan, Kan.: Department of Family and Child Development, Kansas State University, 1983).

31 Nick Stinnet, G. Saunders, John DeFrain, and A. Parkhurst. "A Nationwide Study of Families Who Perceive Themselves as Strong," *Family Perspectives*, Vol. 16 (1982), pp. 15-22.

32 Velma McBride Murry, "Incidence of First Pregnancy Among Black Adolescent Females Over Three Decades," *Youth & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (June 1992), pp. 478-506, esp. p. 483.

33 Larson, Larson, and Gartner, "Families, Relationships and Health."

34 See, for example, G. Burchinal, "Marital Satisfaction and Religious Behavior," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22 (January 1957), pp. 306-310.

35 C. Tavis and S. Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).

36 Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina Kolata, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little Brown 1995), Chapter 6.

37 Wesley Shrum, "Religion and Marital Instability: Change in the 1970s?" *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 21 (1980), pp. 135-147.

other end of the marital spectrum reinforce the point: A 1993 national survey of 3,300 men aged 20-39 found that those who switch partners most are those with no religious convictions.³⁹

Significantly, cohabitation before marriage poses a high risk to later marital stability,⁴⁰ and premarital cohabitation is much less common among religious Americans. "The cohabitation rate is seven times higher among persons who seldom or never attend religious services compared to persons who frequently attend," writes David Larson of the National Institute of Healthcare Research. "Women who attended religious services once a week were only one-third as likely to cohabit as those who attended church services less than once a month." Furthermore, "If the mother frequently attended religious services, both sons and daughters were only 50 percent as likely to cohabit as adult children whose mothers were not actively religious."⁴¹ Rockford Institute President Allan Carlson summarizes the pattern: "Social scientists are discovering the continuing power of religion to protect the family from the forces that would tear it down."⁴²

The fact is that too many social scientists have failed to appreciate the significance of research on the relationship between family and religion. As another researcher of the same period concludes, "We may have underestimated this 'silent majority' and it is only fair to give them equal time."⁴³ The centrality of stable married family life in avoiding such problems as crime,⁴⁴ illegitimacy,⁴⁵ and welfare⁴⁶ has become indisputable. If such a stable family life is linked closely to a lively religious life, as these studies indicate, then the peace and happiness of the nation depend significantly on a renewal of religious practice and belief.

RELIGION AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

In public health circles, the level of educational attainment is held to be the key demographic predictor of physical health. For over two decades, however, the level of religious practice has been shown convincingly to be equally important.

-
- 38 David B. Larson: "Religious Involvement," in *Family Building*, ed. G. E. Rekers (Ventura, Cal.: Regal, 1985), pp. 121-147.
- 39 J. O. Billy, K. Tanfer, W. R. Grady, and D. H. Klepinger, "The Sexual Behavior of Men in the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 25 (1993), pp. 52-60.
- 40 Larry L. Bumpass, James A. Sweet, and Andrew Cherlin, "The Role of Cohabitation in Declining Rates of Marriage," NSFH Working Paper No. 5, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, 1989.
- 41 National Institute of Healthcare Research May 1993 summary of: A. Thorton, W. Axxinn, and D. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98 (1992), pp. 628-651.
- 42 Allan C. Carlson, "Religion and the Family: The Troubled and Enduring Bond," *The Family in America*, Vol. 2 (January 1988), p. 7.
- 43 B. Schlesinger, "Functioning Families: Focus of the 1980s," *Family Perspectives*, Vol. 16 (1982), pp. 111-116.
- 44 Patrick F. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 1026, March 17, 1995.
- 45 Patrick F. Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 19, June 1994.
- 46 Robert Rector, "Combating Family Disintegration, Crime, and Dependence: Welfare Reform and Beyond," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 983, April 1994.

As early as 1972, researchers from the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health found that cardiovascular diseases, the leading killers of older people, were reduced significantly in early old age by a lifetime of regular church attendance. By contrast, non-attendees had higher mortality rates for such other diseases as cirrhosis of the liver, emphysema, and arteriosclerosis, in addition to other cardiovascular diseases and even suicide.⁴⁷ Research on mortality patterns among the poor confirmed a decade later that those who went to church regularly lived longer.⁴⁸ Since then, other studies have reinforced this general finding.⁴⁹

Blood pressure, a key factor in cardiovascular health, is reduced significantly by regular church attendance, on average by 5mm of pressure.⁵⁰ Given that reducing blood pressure by 2 to 4 mm also reduces the mortality rate by 10 to 20 percent for any given population,⁵¹ a reduction of 5 mm is a very significant public health achievement by any standard. For those over 55 years of age, the average decrease was 6 mm. Among those who smoked—a practice that increases blood pressure—regular church attendance decreased the risk of early stroke by 700 percent.⁵²

Nor are the health benefits of religious commitment confined to the cardiovascular system. In 1987, a major review of 250 epidemiological health research studies—studies which examined the relationship between health and religion and measured such additional outcomes as colitis, cancers of many different types, and longevity measures—concluded that, in general, religious commitment improves health.⁵³ A 1991 study of two national samples⁵⁴ also concluded that the degree to which people prayed and participated in religious services significantly affected their health status, regardless of age.⁵⁵

In what must be one of the most unusual experiments in medical history, Dr. Robert B. Byrd, a cardiologist then at the University of California at San Francisco Medical School, conducted a random-sample, double-blind study of the effects of prayer—not *by* the patients but *for* the patients—on the outcome of cardiac surgery. The study was published in 1982. None of the patients knew they were being prayed for, none of the attending doctors

-
- 47 George W. Comstock and Kay B. Partridge, "Church Attendance and Health," *Journal of Chronic Disease*, Vol. 25 (1972), pp. 665-672.
- 48 D. M. Zuckerman, S.V. Kasl, and A. M. Osterfield, "Psychosocial Predictors of Mortality Among the Elderly Poor," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 119 (1984), pp. 410-423.
- 49 For instance, J. S. House, C. Robins, and H. L. Metzner, "The Association of Social Relationships and Activities with Mortality: Prospective Evidence from the Tecumseh Community Health Study," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 114 (1984), p. 129.
- 50 David B. Larson, H. G. Koenig, B. H. Kaplan, R. S. Greenberg, E. Logue, and H. A. Tyroler, "The Impact of Religion on Men's Blood Pressure," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 28 (1989), pp. 265-278.
- 51 W. T. Maramot, "Diet, Hypertension and Stroke," in *Nutrition and Health*, ed. M. R. Turner (New York: Alan R. Liss, 1982), p. 243.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 J. S. Levin and P. L. Schiller, "Is There a Religious Factor in Health?" *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 26 (1987), pp. 9-35.
- 54 The 1984 and 1987 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, which included questions on religious commitment and health.
- 55 K. F. Ferraro and C. M. Albrecht-Jensen, "Does Religion Influence Adult Health?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 30 (1991), pp. 193-202.

and nurses knew who was being prayed for and who was not, and those praying had no personal contact with the patients before or during the experiment. Outcomes for the two sets of patients differed significantly: Those prayed for had noticeably fewer post-operative congestive heart failures, fewer cardiopulmonary arrests, less pneumonia, and less need for antibiotics.⁵⁶ To date, this study has not been replicated, though the intriguing results challenge the academic and medical community to verify or disprove them.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

The practice of religion has beneficial effects on behavior and social relations: on illegitimacy, crime and delinquency, welfare dependency, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, depression, and general self-esteem.

Illegitimacy. One of the most powerful of all factors in preventing out-of-wedlock births is the regular practice of religious belief. Given the growing crisis in out-of-wedlock births, their effects,⁵⁷ and the huge social and economic costs to national and state budgets, this should be of major interest to policymakers.

It has long been known that intensity of religious practice is closely related to adolescent virginity and sexual restraint and control. This general finding, replicated again and again,⁵⁸ also holds true specifically for black teenage girls,⁵⁹ the group with the highest teen pregnancy rates among all demographic subgroups.⁶⁰ Reviews of the literature demonstrate that, nearly without exception, religious practice sharply reduces the incidence of premarital intercourse.⁶¹ The reverse is also true: The absence of religious practice accompanies sexual permissiveness and premarital sex. This is confirmed in numerous studies,⁶² including a 1991 analysis of the federal government's National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.⁶³

-
- 56 R. B. Byrd, "Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population," *Southern Medical Journal*, Vol. 75 (1982), pp. 1166-1168.
- 57 Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe," and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing*, September 1995, esp. chapter on "The Consequences of Nonmarital Childbearing for Women, Children and Society" by Sarah McLanahan.
- 58 Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., *American Teens Speak: Sex, Myths, TV, and Birth Control*, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., 1986; Thornton and Camburn, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes."
- 59 Murry, "Incidence of First Pregnancy Among Black Adolescent Females Over Three Decades."
- 60 *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 21, 1995), DHHS/CDC/NCHS, Table 15.
- 61 Bernard Spilka; Ralph W. Hood, and Richard L. Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985); Cheryl D. Hayes, ed., "Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Childbearing," Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: National Academic Press, 1987); Michael J. Donahue, "Aggregate Religiousness and Teenage Fertility Revisited: Reanalyses of Data from the Guttmacher Institute," paper presented at Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Chicago, Illinois, October 1988; Catherine S. Chilman, "Adolescent Sexuality in a Changing American Society: Social and Psychological Perspectives," NIH Publication No. 80-1426 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980).
- 62 The following studies are cited in Scott H. Beck, Bettie S. Cole, and Judith A. Hammond, "Religious Heritage and Premarital Sex: Evidence from a National Sample of Young Adults," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1991), pp. 173-180; H. T. Christensen and L. B. Johnson, "Premarital Coitus and the Southern Black: A Comparative View," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 40 (1978), pp. 721-731; Stephen R. Jorgensen and Janet S. Sonstegard, "Predicting Adolescent Sexual and Contraceptive Behavior: An Application and Test of the Fishbein Model," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 46 (1984), pp. 43-55; F. L. Mott, "The Patterning of Female Teenage Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes," paper

The impact of religious practice on teenage sexual behavior also can be seen at the state level: States with higher levels of aggregate religiousness have lower rates of teenage pregnancy.⁶⁴

In an important study published in 1987, a group of professors from the Universities of Georgia, Utah, and Wyoming found that the main cause of problematic adolescent sexual behaviors and attitudes is not only family dynamics and processes, as previously thought, but the absence of religious behavior and affiliation. They further concluded that healthy family dynamics and practices are themselves caused to a powerful degree by the presence or absence of religious beliefs and practices.⁶⁵ The same results also hold true in international comparisons.⁶⁶

As with drugs, alcohol, and crime, the religious behavior of the mother is one of the strongest predictors of the daughter's sexual attitudes.⁶⁷ It also has long been known in the social sciences that daughters of single mothers are more likely to engage in premarital sexual behavior during adolescence.⁶⁸ These mothers are more frequently permissive in their sexual attitudes, and religion for them has less importance than it has for mothers in two-parent families.⁶⁹ These findings also have been replicated.⁷⁰

The religious practices of parents, particularly their unity on religious issues, powerfully influence the behavior of children. Thus, for policymakers interested in reducing teenage (and older) out-of-wedlock births, the lesson is clear: Religious belief and regular worship reduce the likelihood of this form of family breakdown. One faith-based sex education course that included both mothers and daughters, for example, was aimed specifically at reducing the teenage pregnancy rate. The results were notably successful: Out-of-wedlock births among the at-risk population were almost eliminated.⁷¹

presented at 1983 Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association, Dallas, Texas, November 1983; and J. M. Studer and A. Thornton, "Adolescent Religiosity and Contraceptive Usage," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47 (1985), pp. 381-395.

63 Beck *et al.*, "Religious Heritage and Premarital Sex: Evidence from a National Sample of Young Adults."

64 Donahue, "Aggregate Religiousness and Teenage Fertility Revisited: Reanalyses of Data from the Guttmacher Institute."

65 Brent C. Miller, Robert Higginson, J. Kelly McCoy, and Terrance D. Olson, "Family Configuration and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behavior," *Population and Environment*, Vol. 9 (1987), pp. 111-123.

66 Elise F. Jones *et al.*, "Teenage Pregnancy in Developed Countries: Determinants and Policy Implications," *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (March/April 1985), pp. 53-63.

67 Arland D. Thornton, "Family and Institutional Factors in Adolescent Sexuality," found in HHS/Public Health Service, "Summaries of Completed Adolescent Family Life Research Projects on Adolescent Sexual Behavior," a 1991 internal staff summary of HHS-funded research projects.

68 See, for example, Brian C. Martinson and Larry L. Bumpass, "The Impact of Family Background on Premarital Births among Women under 30 in the United States," NSFH Working Paper No. 9, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, April 1990.

69 S. Newcomer and J. R. Undry, "Parental Marital Status Effects on Adolescent Sexual Behavior," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 49 (1987), pp. 235-240.

70 For example, Thornton and Camburn, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes."

71 This study, "Fertility Appreciation for Families," involved a matched control design. Unpublished but peer reviewed, it is available from Family of the Americas, P.O. Box 1170, Dunkirk, Maryland 20754.

Crime and Delinquency. A review of the small amount of research done on the relationship between crime and religion shows that states with more religious populations tend to have fewer homicides and fewer suicides.⁷²

A four-year longitudinal, stratified, random-sample study of high school students in the Rocky Mountain region, published in 1975, demonstrated that religious involvement significantly decreased drug use, delinquency, and premarital sex, and also increased self-control.⁷³ A 1989 study of midwestern high school students replicated these findings.⁷⁴ Similarly, young religious adults in Canada were found in a 1979 study to be less likely to use or sell narcotics, to gamble, or to destroy property.⁷⁵

What is true for youth is also true for adults.⁷⁶ Religious behavior, as opposed to mere attitude or affiliation, is associated with reduced crime.⁷⁷ This has been known in the social science literature for over 20 years.⁷⁸

In research conducted in the late 1980s—controlling for family, economic, and religious backgrounds—a research team from the University of Nevada found that black men who eventually ended up in prison and those who did not came respectively from two different groups: those who did not go to church, or stopped going around ten years of age, and those who went regularly.⁷⁹ This failure of faith at the onset of adolescence parallels the pattern found among those who become alcoholics or drug addicts. Clearly, the family's inability to inspire regular religious worship among emerging young adults is a sign of internal weakness.

Welfare Dependency. In his classic study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber, the preeminent German sociologist of the first half of the 20th century, demonstrated the connection between religious practice and financial well-being among Protestants. Other work on the same theme shows that this is not confined to Protestants, but that it applies across a longer period of history and across denominational lines.

This link between religion and prosperity has important implications for the poor. In 1985, for instance, Richard B. Freeman of the National Bureau of Economic Research reported that:

-
- 72 David Lester, "Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 127, No. 6 (December 1987), pp. 685-686.
- 73 John Rohrbaugh and Richard Jessor, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, "Religiosity in Youth: A Personal Control Against Deviant Behavior," *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1975), pp. 136-155.
- 74 John K. Cochran, "Another Look at Delinquency and Religiosity," *Sociological Spectrum*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1989), pp. 147-162.
- 75 Avtar Singh, "Note: Religious Involvement and Anti-Social Behavior," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, Vol. 48 (1979), pp. 1157-1158.
- 76 For instance, see Lee Ellis, "Religiosity and Criminality from the Perspective of Arousal Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (August 1987), pp. 215-232.
- 77 John Gartner, David B. Larson, and George Allen, "Religious Commitment and Mental Health: A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 19 (1991), pp. 6-25.
- 78 Beit-Hallami, "Psychology of Religion 1880-1939," pp. 84-90.
- 79 Naida M. Parson and James K. Mikawa, "Incarceration and Nonincarceration of African-American Men Raised in Black Christian Churches," *The Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 125 (1990), pp. 163-173.

[Church attendance] is associated with substantial differences in the behavior of [black male youths from poverty-stricken inner-city neighborhoods] and thus in their chances to “escape” from inner city poverty. It affects allocation of time, school-going, work activity and the frequency of socially deviant activity....It is important to recognize that our analysis has identified an important set of variables that separate successful from unsuccessful young persons in the inner city. There is a significant number of inner city youth, readily identifiable, who succeed in escaping that pathology of inner-city slum life.⁸⁰

Ongoing studies by Professor Ranald Jarrell of the Department of Education at Arizona State University West show the power of religious belief and practice in encouraging a spirit of optimism among socially at-risk but advancing children. The subjects are students at the De La Salle Academy, an independent school in the upper west side of Manhattan serving primarily poor inner-city black and Hispanic middle school children who show substantial academic promise. Within this group, the highest concentration of pessimists is found among students with the lowest attendance at church. Those who attend church weekly or more frequently, on the other hand, exhibit the following profiles:

- ✓ They are more optimistic about their futures;
- ✓ They have better relationships with their parents;
- ✓ They are more likely to dismiss racism as an obstacle to reaching their goals;
- ✓ They are more likely to have serious and realistic goals for their futures;
- ✓ They are more likely to see the world as a friendly place in which they can achieve, rather than as a hostile world with powerful forces arrayed against them; and
- ✓ They are more likely to see themselves as in control of their own futures, whereas those who do not attend church are more likely to see themselves as victims of oppression.⁸¹

Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the best national sample for tracking the development of America’s youth from the late 1970s, clearly indicate the difference regular religious practice makes for those who grew up in poverty in the 1970s and 1980s. Among those who attended church weekly in both 1979 and 1982, average family income in 1993 was \$37,021; among those who never attended church in 1979 or 1982, however, average family income in 1993 was \$24,361— a difference of \$12,660.⁸²

Other studies also show that growing up in an intact family correlates significantly and positively with future earnings.⁸³ However, the NLSY data show that regular religious practice benefits both those who grow up in intact families *and* those who grow up in broken

80 Richard B. Freeman, “Who Escapes? The Relation of Church-Going and Other Background Factors to the Socio-Economic Performance of Black Male Youths from Inner-City Poverty Tracts,” Working Paper Series No. 1656, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985.

81 Ranald Jarrell, Department of Education, Arizona State University West, personal communication, October 1995.

82 Analysis of NLSY data by Heritage Foundation analyst Christine Olson.

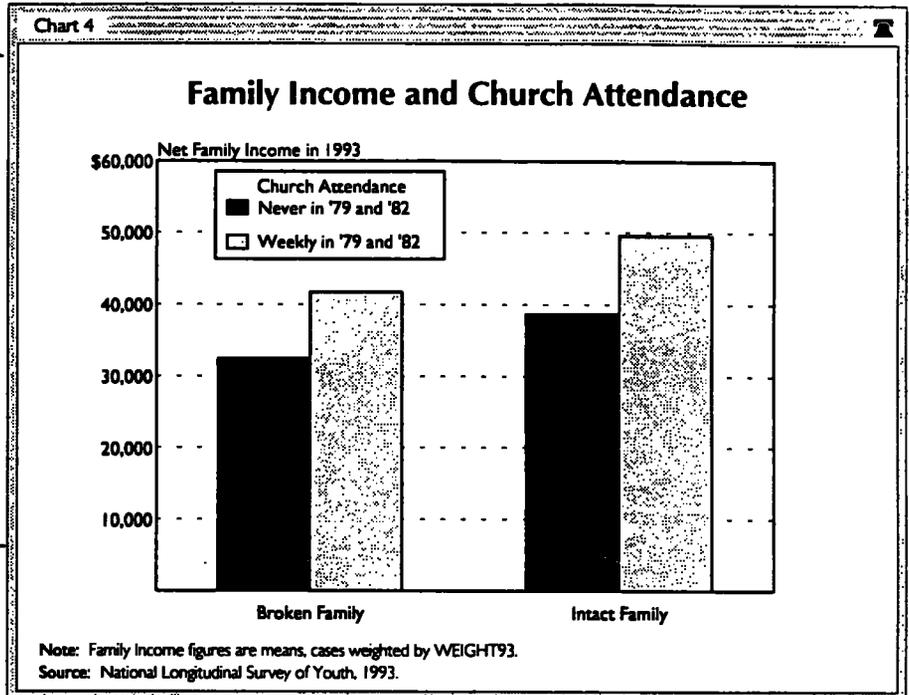
83 Fagan, “Rising Illegitimacy: America’s Social Catastrophe,” p. 5.

families. The other differences remain, but the positive impact of religion on both groups is evident.⁸⁴

Alcohol and Drug Abuse. The relationship between religious practice and the moderate use or avoidance of alcohol is well documented,⁸⁵ regardless of whether denominational beliefs prohibit the use of alcohol.⁸⁶ According to general studies, the higher the level of religious involvement, the less likely the use or abuse of alcohol.⁸⁷

Persons who abuse alcohol rarely have a strong religious commitment.⁸⁸ In their study of the development of alcohol abuse, David Larson and William P. Wilson, professors of psychiatry at Northwestern Uni-

versity School of Medicine, found that nine out of ten alcoholics had lost interest in religion in their teenage years, in sharp contrast to teenagers generally, among whom interest in religion increased by almost 50 percent and declined by only 14 percent.⁸⁹ Robert Coombs and his colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine found that alcohol abuse is 300 percent higher among those who do not attend church.⁹⁰



- 84 Given the significance of these findings, which are now over 10 years old, it is telling that no further research seems to have been conducted along these lines by the welfare interest group in academia. In the business field, there is considerable anecdotal literature of the testimonial genre which recounts the effect of religious belief or conversion on work capacity and outcomes; in the academic literature, however, there seems to be little or none. See "Religion and the Social Sciences," *infra*.
- 85 Achaempong Yaw Amoateng and Stephen J. Bahr, "Religion, Family, and Adolescent Drug Use," *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 29 (1986), pp. 53-73, and John K. Cochran, Leonard Beghley, and E. Wilbur Block, "Religiosity and Alcohol Behavior: An Exploration of Reference Group Therapy," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 3 (1988), pp. 256-276.
- 86 Amoateng and Bahr, "Religion, Family, and Adolescent Drug Use."
- 87 Gartner, Larson, and Allen, "Religious Commitment and Mental Health: A Review of the Empirical Literature"; Steven R. Burkett and Mervin White, "Hellfire and Delinquency: Another Look," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 13 (1974), pp. 455-462; Deborah Hasin, Jean Endicott, and Collins Lewis, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Patients with Affective Syndromes," *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol. 26 (1985), pp. 283-295.
- 88 David B. Larson and William P. Wilson: "Religious Life of Alcoholics," *Southern Medical Journal*, Vol. 73 (1980), pp. 723-727.
- 89 *Ibid*.
- 90 Robert H. Coombs, David K. Wellisch, and Fawzy I. Fawzy, "Drinking Patterns and Problems among Female Children and Adolescents: A Comparison of Abstainers, Past Users and Current Users," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, Vol. 11 (1985), pp. 315-348.

Drug and alcohol use is lowest in the most conservative religious denominations and highest in non-religious groups, while liberal church groups have use rates just slightly lower than those for non-religious groups. But for all groups, religious commitment correlates with absence of drug abuse.⁹¹

Significantly, involvement in any religious denomination or group generally decreases the level of drug use regardless of whether the denomination teaches against the use of alcohol, although denominations that teach against any use of drugs or alcohol exhibit the highest rates of drug avoidance. Among traditional American religions, Mormons have the highest denominational association between religious doctrine and drug avoidance; they also have the most restrictive proscriptions against drug use. On the other hand, Roman Catholics have the highest alcohol use rate; their religion condemns the abuse of alcohol but does not proscribe its use.⁹²

Attendance at church and related religious activities has special significance for drug use among teenagers. In a 1985 study of young girls aged between 9 and 17, less than 10 percent of those who reported attending religious services weekly or more often indicated any drug or alcohol use, compared with 38 percent of all those studied.⁹³

The parental attitude to religion also is important in dealing with alcohol use. A 1985 study indicated that if the mother and father have deep, competing differences toward religious belief and practice, their children are more likely to use or abuse alcohol than are children whose parents do not differ on matters of religion. Conversely, if their parents' religious beliefs and practices are similar, children are far more likely to abstain from alcohol or to drink with moderation.⁹⁴ Almost three decades before these findings, Orville Walters, then a research fellow at the Menninger School of Psychiatry in Topeka, Kansas, found that alcoholics who came from religious backgrounds tended to have mothers who were highly religious but fathers who were more non-religious.⁹⁵

For over four decades it has been known,⁹⁶ and replicated,⁹⁷ that alcoholics with a religious background or strong religious beliefs are much more likely to seek help and treatment. Indeed, Alcoholics Anonymous, the major organization combating alcoholism in America, has known for over half a century that the most effective element in its program is its religious or spiritual component.⁹⁸ David Larson of the National Institute for Healthcare Research notes: "Even after alcoholism has been established, religion is often a powerful

91 Barbara R. Lorch and Robert H. Hughes, "Religion and Youth Substance Use," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 24 (1985), pp. 197-208.

92 Amoateng and Bahr, "Religion, Family, and Adolescent Drug Use."

93 Lorch and Hughes, "Religion and Youth Substance Use."

94 Coombs, Wellisch, and Fawzy, "Drinking Patterns and Problems among Female Children and Adolescents: A Comparison of Abstainers, Past Users and Current Users."

95 Orville S. Walters, "The Religious Background of Fifty Alcoholics," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. 18 (1957), pp. 405-413.

96 F. Lemere, "What Happens to Alcoholics?" *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 22 (1953), pp. 674-676.

97 Walters, "The Religious Background of Fifty Alcoholics."

98 H. M. Tiebaut, "Psychological Factors Operating in Alcoholics Anonymous," in *Current Therapies of Personality Disorders*, ed. B. Glueck (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1946).

force in achieving abstinence. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) uses religion, invoking a Higher Power to help alcoholics recover from addiction."⁹⁹

Paralleling the research on alcohol addiction, an early review of studies of drug addiction found a lack of religious commitment to be a predictor of who abuses drugs.¹⁰⁰ Many more recent studies replicate this finding.¹⁰¹ As in so many other research studies, the best measurement of religious commitment is frequency of church attendance: "Overall church attendance was more strongly related to [less] drug use than was intensity of religious feelings."¹⁰² This is true for both males and females. According to Jerald G. Bachman of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, "Factors we found to be most important in predicting use of marijuana and other drugs during the late 1970's remained most important during the early 1980's. Drug use is below average among those with strong religious commitments."¹⁰³ The more powerfully addictive the drug being considered, the more powerful is the impact of church attendance in preventing its use.¹⁰⁴

In results almost identical to those for alcoholics, researchers at the National Institute of Drug Abuse, a section of the National Institutes of Health and the nation's premier drug abuse research facility, found in their interviews of narcotic addicts that "the addict had neither current religious preference nor a history of attending religious services....In addition... the addicts' fathers were much less involved in regular or frequent religious practices, than were a parallel group of control fathers....Religiously, the mother was far more involved than her husband, the difference in regular religious participation between the addict's parents being twice that for the control's parents....Religiously, the addicts were significantly less involved in reading the Bible, and praying." They also had far more frequent loss of interest in religion during adolescence.¹⁰⁵

Louis A. Cancellaro of the Department of Psychiatry at the Veterans Administration in Johnson City, Tennessee, writes that, "Like their fathers, addicts are less religiously involved than their normal peers, and during adolescence, less frequently make decisions

99 Larson and Larson, "The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health," p. 71.

100 Richard L. Gorsuch and M. C. Butler, "Initial Drug Abuse: A View of Predisposing Social Psychological Factors," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 3 (1976), pp. 120-137.

101 For example, Ron D. Hays, Alan W. Stacy, Keith F. Widaman, M. Robin DiMatteo, and Ralph Downey, "Multistage Path Models of Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Use: A Reanalysis," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 16 (1986), pp. 357-369; Hasin, Endicott, and Lewis, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Patients with Affective Syndromes"; Steven R. Burkett, "Religion, Parental Influence and Adolescent Alcohol and Marijuana Use," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 7 (1977), pp. 263-273; Lorch and Hughes, "Religion and Youth Substance Use"; and Edward M. Adalf and Reginald G. Smart, "Drug Use and Religious Affiliation, Feelings and Behavior," *British Journal of Addiction*, Vol. 80 (1985), pp. 163-171.

102 Adalf and Smart, "Drug Use and Religious Affiliation, Feelings and Behavior."

103 Jerald G. Bachman, Lloyd D. Johnson, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Explaining the Recent Decline in Cocaine Use Among Young Adults: Further Evidence That Perceived Risks and Disapproval Lead to Reduced Drug Use," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 31 (1990), pp. 173-184, and Hasin, Endicott, and Lewis, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Patients With Affective Syndromes." The findings of this NIMH-supported study were replicated in the above-cited study by Bachman, Johnson, and O'Malley.

104 Adalf and Smart, "Drug Use and Religious Affiliation, Feelings and Behavior."

105 M. Daum and M. A. Lavenhar, "Religiosity and Drug Use," National Institute of Drug Abuse, DHEW Publication No. (ADM) 80-939, 1980.

either to become more interested in religion or to commit themselves to a religious philosophy to live by.”¹⁰⁶

In reviewing the religious treatment of addicts, research psychiatrists at the Duke University Department of Psychiatry concluded in 1992: “[The] role of religious commitment and

religiously oriented treatment programs can be significant factors which ought to be considered and included when planning a mix of appropriate treatment alternatives.... Perhaps the greatest advantage of religious programs is their recourse to churches as a support system..

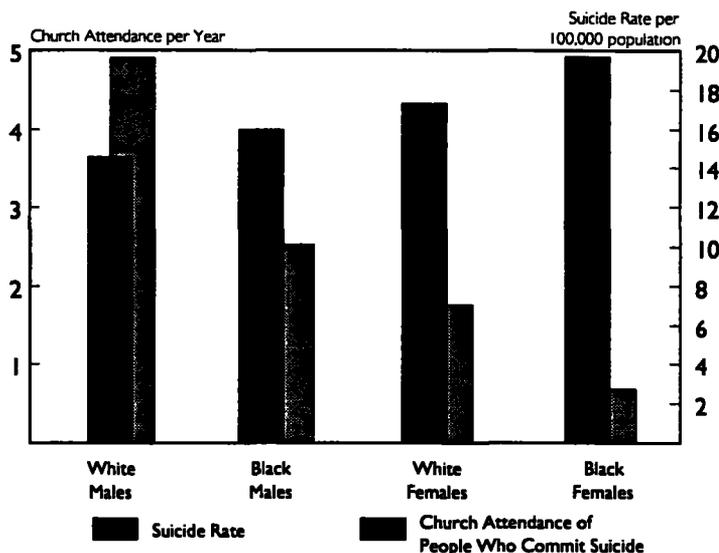
..Religious treatment programs

are not suitable for everyone. For those men and women who can accept the creeds, rituals, and commitments required of such programs there seem to be certain advantages.”¹⁰⁷

Suicide. The practice of religion reduces the rate of suicide, both in the United States and abroad.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the rate of church attendance predicts the suicide rate better than any other factor (including unemployment, traditionally regarded as the most powerful variable). Those who attend church frequently are four times less likely to commit suicide than those who never attend. Conversely, the national decline in church attendance is associated with a heightened suicide rate; fluctuations in church attendance rates in the 1970s paralleled the suicide rates for different subgroups: whites, blacks, men, and women.¹⁰⁹

Chart 5

Suicides and Church Attendance



Source: William T. Martin, "Religiosity and United States Suicide Rates, 1972-1978," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 40 (1984), pp. 1166-1169.

106 Louis A. Cancellaro, David B. Larson, and William P. Wilson, "Religious Life of Narcotics Addicts," *Southern Medical Journal*, Vol. 75, No. 10 (October 1992), pp. 1166-1168.

107 John Muffler, John Langrod, and David Larson, "'There Is a Balm in Gilead': Religion and Substance Abuse Rehabilitation," in *Substance Abuse: A Comprehensive Textbook*, ed. J. H. Lowinson, P. Ruiz, et al. (Baltimore, Md.: Williams and Wilkins, 1992), pp. 584-595.

108 Charles E. Joubert, "Religious Nonaffiliation in Relation to Suicide, Murder, Rape, and Illegitimacy," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 75, No. 1, Part 1 (1994), p. 10, and Jon W. Hoelter, "Religiosity, Fear of Death and Suicide Acceptability," *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, Vol. 9 (1979), pp. 163-172.

109 William T. Martin, "Religiosity and United States Suicide Rates, 1972-1978," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 40 (1984), pp. 1166-1169.

Steven Stack, professor of sociology at Pennsylvania State University, in a landmark 1985 study on the demography of suicide has found that "Families and religion change together over time....As the importance of the domestic-religious institutional complex declines, the study finds a rise in the rate of suicide, both for the general population and for the age cohort at the center of the decline, the youth cohort."¹¹⁰ In another, earlier study, Stack broke new ground in finding that the effect of unemployment in causing suicide is greatly diminished when religious behavior is factored into the equation.¹¹¹

In inter-state comparisons, higher levels of church attendance are associated with lower rates of suicide.¹¹² The same holds true in international comparisons.¹¹³

Depression. Religion appears to reduce the incidence of depression among those with medical problems. For instance, University of Michigan Professor of Sociology David Williams conducted a randomized survey of 720 adults suffering from leg and hip injuries in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1990. Those who attended religious services regularly were less depressed and less distressed by life events than those who did not. This finding held across age, race, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and religious affiliation. Religious affiliation alone did not have these effects, but religious behavior did.¹¹⁴

Younger people also tend to experience fewer of the anxieties of growing up if they are religious. For instance, both male and female Texas high-schoolers found that religious beliefs gave meaning to their lives and reduced the incidence of depression among them.¹¹⁵

Self-esteem. The absence of self-esteem weakens the personality and puts the person at greater risk for crime, addictions, and other social maladies.¹¹⁶ In all religious denominations, psychological weaknesses decrease as religious orthodoxy increases.¹¹⁷ Among college students, for instance, the practice of religion was shown in 1969 to have a positive effect on mental health;¹¹⁸ students involved with campus ministries were much healthier and made much less use of mental health services.

110 Steven Stack, "The Effect of Domestic-Religious Individualism on Suicide, 1954-1978," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47 (1985), pp. 431-447.

111 Steven Stack, "The Effect of the Decline in Institutionalized Religion on Suicide, 1954-1978," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 22 (1983), pp. 239-252.

112 Lester, "Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates."

113 Steven Stack: "The Effects of Religious Commitment on Suicide: A Cross-National Analysis," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 24 (1983), pp. 362-374.

114 Williams, Larson, Buckler, Heckman, and Pyle, "Religion and Psychological Distress in a Community Sample," pp. 1257-1262. Religious commitment also had other benefits. Not only were members of the group less depressed, but they could walk a greater distance at discharge than those without religious beliefs and practices. See Peter Pressman, John S. Lyons, David B. Larson, and James J. Strain, "Religious Belief, Depression and Ambulation Status in Elderly Women with Broken Hips," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 147 (1990), pp. 758-760.

115 Loyd S. Wright, Christopher J. Frost, and Stephen J. Wisecarver, "Church Attendance, Meaningfulness of Religion on, and Depressive Symptomology Among Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (1993), pp. 559-568.

116 Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community."

117 Stark, "Psychopathology and Religious Commitment."

118 Clyde C. Mayo, Herbert B. Puryear, and Herbert G. Richek, "MMPI Correlates of Religiousness in Late Adolescent College Students," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 149 (November 1969), pp. 381-385. These findings do not hold for "ego strength." (However, refer to the section on measurements, where this particular finding will be looked at again.)

Significantly, self-esteem is linked to a person's image of God. Those with high self-esteem think of God primarily as loving, while those with low self-esteem think of God primarily as punitive.¹¹⁹ This was observed by Carl Jung, one of the most influential pioneers of modern psychology and psychotherapy: "Among all my patients in the second half of my life...there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook."¹²⁰ Other evidence exists that people with a religious commitment, whether young or old, who become emotionally or psychologically distressed are much more likely to seek help.¹²¹

UNDERSTANDING "INTRINSIC" AND "EXTRINSIC" RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR

Recent advances in the investigation of religious behavior have led social scientists to distinguish between two distinct categories or orientations: "intrinsic" and "extrinsic." Intrinsic practice is God-oriented and based on beliefs which transcend the person's own existence. Research shows this form of religious practice to be beneficial. Extrinsic practice is self-oriented and characterized by outward observance, not internalized as a guide to behavior or attitudes. The evidence suggests this form of religious practice is actually more harmful than no religion: Religion directed toward some end other than God, or the transcendent, typically degenerates into a rationalization for the pursuit of other ends such as status, personal security, self justification, or sociability.

The difference between these two forms of religious practice have implications for future research and for the interpretation of all research on religious practice. There is a radical difference between what religious people know to be conversion of the spirit or heart and simply conforming external behavior for its own sake, or for benefits derived from religious behavior.¹²²

William James, professor of psychology at Harvard University in the early 1900s and a pioneer in the psychological study of religious behavior, was the first to make the social science distinction between the two forms of religious practice. Gordon Allport, his successor at Harvard in the late 1960s, concluded: "I feel equally sure that mental health is facilitated by an intrinsic, but not an extrinsic, religious orientation."¹²³

The two orientations lead to two very different sets of psychological effects. For instance, "intrinsic" have a greater sense of responsibility and greater internal control, are more self-motivated, and do better in their studies. By contrast, "extrinsic" are more likely to be dogmatic, authoritarian, and less responsible, to have less internal control, to be less self-di-

119 Peter L. Bensen and Bernard P. Spilka, "God-Image as a Function of Self-Esteem and Locus of Control" in *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion*, ed. H. N. Maloney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 209-224.

120 Carl Jung: "Psychotherapies on the Clergy," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 327-347.

121 Walters, "The Religious Background of Fifty Alcoholics."

122 Larson and Larson, "The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health," p. 87.

123 Gordon W. Allport, "The Person in Psychology: Selected Essays" (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 150.

rected, and to do less well in their studies.¹²⁴ Intrinsic are more concerned with moral standards, conscientiousness, discipline, responsibility, and consistency than are extrinsically religious people.¹²⁵ They also are more sensitive to others and more open to their own emotions. By contrast, extrinsics are more self-indulgent, indolent, and likely to lack dependability. For example, the most racially prejudiced people turn out to be those who go to church occasionally¹²⁶ and those who are extrinsic in their practice of religion.¹²⁷ These findings have been replicated¹²⁸ in a number of different forms.¹²⁹

The contrasting effects show up in college students. Intrinsically religious students tend to have internal locus of control, intrinsic motives, and a higher grade point average.¹³⁰ By contrast, a 1980 study indicated that extrinsically religious students were more dogmatic and authoritarian, less responsible and less motivated, had less internal locus of control, and had a lower grade point average. Intrinsically religious students were found to have a greater concern for moral standards and to be more conscientious, disciplined, responsible, and consistent, while the extrinsic were more self-indulgent, more indolent, and less dependable.¹³¹

In general, intrinsic are less anxious about life's ups and downs, while extrinsic are more anxious. Further, the religious beliefs and practices of intrinsic are more integrated; for instance, they are more likely to worship publicly as well as pray privately. By contrast, those who pray privately but do not worship publicly tend to have a higher level of general anxiety—a characteristic of extrinsic generally.¹³² In an ironic set of findings on anxiety about death, extrinsic fared worst of all: worse than intrinsic and worse than those without religious beliefs.¹³³ From a purely social science standpoint, the intrinsic form of religion is thus good and desirable, and the extrinsic form is harmful. Religious teachers, without being utilitarian, would agree.¹³⁴

124 R. D. Kahoe, "Personality and Achievement Correlates on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 29 (1974), pp. 812-818.

125 Ken F. Wiebe and J. Roland Fleck, "Personality Correlates of Intrinsic, Extrinsic and Non-Religious Orientations," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 105 (1980), pp. 111-117.

126 Michael J. Donahue, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiousness: Review and Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 48 (1985), pp. 400-419.

127 *Ibid.*

128 Allen E. Bergin, K. S. Masters, and P. Scott Richards, "Religiousness and Mental Health Reconsidered: A Study of an Intrinsically Religious Sample," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 34 (1987), pp. 197-204.

129 M. Baker and R. Gorsuch, "Trait Anxiety and Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religiousness," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 21 (1982), pp. 119-122, and Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 5 (1967), pp. 432-443.

130 Kahoe, "Personality and Achievement Correlates on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientations."

131 Wiebe and Fleck, "Personality Correlates of Intrinsic, Extrinsic and Non-Religious Orientations."

132 Bergin, Masters, and Richards, "Religiousness and Mental Health Reconsidered: A Study of an Intrinsically Religious Sample."

133 Ann M. Downey, "Relationships of Religiosity to Death Anxiety of Middle-Aged Males," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 54 (1984), pp. 811-822.

134 The benefit of the intrinsic practice of religion certainly be obvious to most ordinary Americans. But in research results, many of the deleterious effects of the extrinsic practice of religion wipe out many of the benefits of intrinsic practice when adherents of both are mixed together in the same piece of research. Most religious research to date does not measure or differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic practice of religion. Despite this shortcoming, the studies cited up to now do not distinguish

RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

There is a tension between practitioners of social science and religious belief.¹³⁵ Darwin L. Thomas and Gwendolyn C. Henry, professors of sociology at Brigham Young University, write: "From the work of Freud and others, much of the early history of the social sciences is characterized by the expectation that involvement in and reliance upon the religious institution will be associated with people who have a low sense of personal well-being."¹³⁶

There is repeated evidence that much the same hostility to religion—a hostility at variance with the attitude of the vast majority of Americans—persists among members of America's professional elites.¹³⁷

- ◆ Stephen L. Carter, professor of law at Yale University, points out that "One sees a trend in our political and legal cultures toward treating religious beliefs as arbitrary and unimportant, a trend supported by rhetoric that implies that there is something wrong with religious devotion. More and more, our culture seems to take the position that believing deeply in the tenets of one's faith represents a kind of mystical irrationality, something that thoughtful, public-spirited American citizens would do better to avoid."¹³⁸ However, the available evidence renders such opposition unreasonable.
- ◆ Professor David Larson of Duke University Medical School draws attention to similar biases in the mental health professions. Consider *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, the standard reference manual for the classification of mental illnesses, which essentially defines the practice of psychiatrists, clinical psychology, and clinical social work and is central to the practice, research, and financing of these professions. In the third edition, religious examples were used only as illustrations in discussions of mental illness, such as delusions, incoherence, and illogical thinking. The latest edition has corrected this bias.

between these types of religious practice, yet show a very positive outcome. This poses a number of important research issues, chief among them whether this is because there are only a few extrinsics among those who go to church most frequently. For researchers and those who commission research, there is an obvious need to measure whether the person's practice of religion, when it is present, is more intrinsic or extrinsic. Fortunately, a simple validated scale has been developed to measure the person's religious motivation. See Dean R. Hoge, "A Validated Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale," *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 11 (1972), pp. 369-376.

135 In the view of this author, that tension arises from the effort of the social sciences to contain religion within the canons of the social sciences. However the canons of religion transcend these canons, and therefore cannot be reduced to the dimensions of any of the social sciences, though every social science can describe some facets of religious behavior.

136 Thomas and Henry, "The Religion and Family Connection: Increasing Dialogue in the Social Sciences."

137 The Gallup survey (Religion in America 1985) continues to indicate that religious commitment is avowed by one-third of Americans as the most important dimension in their lives and that, for another third, religion is considered to be very important (but not the single most dominant) factor. *Religion in America: The Gallup Report, Report No. 236, 1985* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1985) quoted in Alan E. Bergin and Jay P. Stevens, "Religiosity of Psychotherapists: A National Survey," *Psychotherapy*, Vol. 27 (1990), pp. 3-7.

138 Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), pp. 6-7.

- ◆ Consider also the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, one of the most widely used of all psychological tests. In the MMPI, all the positive religion-connected traits—self-discipline, altruism, humility, obedience to authority, conventional morality—are weighted negatively. Thus, to choose the self-description “I am orthodoxly religious” is to detract from one’s mental health standing. Conversely, several traits that religious people would regard as diminishing themselves, at least in some situations—self-assertion, self-expression, and a high opinion of oneself—are weighted positively.¹³⁹ The latest editions of the MMPI have removed the biased items.

Despite this general hostility among social science and mental health professionals, the empirical evidence shows religion to be a very powerful and positive part of everyday life. Patrick McNamara, professor of sociology at the University of New Mexico, explains the difference between social scientists and religiously affiliated people generally: “Sociologists tend to see concern for personal challenge—e.g. to get one’s own moral life in order—as somehow secondary to social challenge or the effort to identify and criticize those socio-economic structures that inhibit the individual’s own group from attaining a fuller human existence.”¹⁴⁰ McNamara continues: “In [the] typical social science analysis, the demands of the inner life are neglected and personal agency and autonomy exercised in the choice to examine one’s own life and put it in order according to an internalized ethic of repentance... is not acknowledged.”¹⁴¹

Despite the attitude of many professionals, Gallup surveys continue to indicate that one-third of the American people regard religious commitment as the most important dimension in their lives. Another third regard religion as a very important, though not the single most dominant, factor in their lives.¹⁴²

Totally secular approaches to many issues—public policy, psychotherapy, and education—use an alien framework for this two-thirds of the population. The plain fact is that religion plays a powerful role in the personal and social lives of most Americans. It is a role that should be understood clearly by the professions, by policymakers, and by the media.

From many other areas of social science research—family dynamics, group dynamics, marital dynamics—positive reciprocal relationships with others are known to be powerful across a host of areas similar to those reviewed in this paper: stress, ability to relate with others in general, productivity, and learning, to name just a few. The core of the religious commitment is an intention to have a positive relationship with another Being, a transcendent and therefore all-available Being. Viewed in this fashion, the documented effects of religious commitment are not mysterious, but an extension of the effects which we know arise from positive relations between human beings. Thus, the findings on religion fit with the general corpus of what is known about relationships from the existing body of social science research.

139 Larson and Larson, “The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health.”

140 Patrick McNamara, “The New Rights View of the Family and Its Social Science Critics: A Study in Differing Presuppositions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 47 (1985), pp. 449-458.

141 *Ibid.*

142 *Religion in America.*

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The evidence indicates strongly that it is a good social policy to foster the widespread practice of religion. It is bad social policy to block it. The widespread practice of religious beliefs is one of America's greatest national resources. It strengthens individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. It significantly affects educational and job attainment and reduces the incidence of such major social problems as out-of-wedlock births, drug and alcohol addiction, crime, and delinquency. No other dimension of the nation's life, other than the health of the family (which the data show also is tied powerfully to religious practice) should be of more concern to those who guide the future course of the United States.

The original intent of the Founding Fathers was to bar the establishment by the federal government of a state-approved religion, not to bar religion from the operations of the state. Thomas Jefferson made this distinction very clear in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (January 16, 1786):

We, the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief: but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.¹⁴³

George Washington summed up the importance of religion to the new nation with particular eloquence in his farewell address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

'Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can

143 Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, 9th ed. (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 175.

look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?¹⁴⁴

A policy can be friendly to the general practice of religion, and to the many different faiths in a pluralistic society, without in any way implying the establishment of a particular religion. Federal policies encourage many other institutions: the marketplace, education, medicine, science, and the arts. Even religion itself is explicitly encouraged by the tax treatment of contributions to religious institutions. It makes no sense, therefore, not to encourage the resource that most powerfully addresses the major social problems confronting the nation. Congress and the President can help to accomplish this by acting decisively in at least six specific areas:

- ① **Congress, and the Senate in particular, should lead a new national debate on the renewed role of religion in American life.** With his recent guidance to school administrators on prayer in school, President Clinton has opened the national discussion. The Senate once was the chamber for debate on the great issues of the day. It is time for it to take up that role again on the relationship between the practice of religion and the life of the nation, on the health of America's families and the content of its culture.

America needs a major national debate on the true role of religion in a free and pluralistic society. For many decades, the once-prominent place of religion in society has been eroded. Religious leaders, who should be in the forefront of moral and spiritual renewal, have been cowed into a strange timidity. Americans of religious belief should not be bullied into believing that in all things related to the public good, religion is to remain off limits. The constitutional freedom of religion does not mean the constitutional barring of religion from the public square.

- ② **Congress should pass a resolution affirming that data on religious practice are important to the nation, to policymakers, and to the research needed to inform the public debate.** The gathering of data that touch on religious practice often is blocked in research on social issues funded by the federal government.¹⁴⁵ Because government funds a huge proportion of the nation's funded social research, this has a chilling effect. But the relationship between religious practice and the social issues under investigation by government, such as out-of-wedlock births, crime and delinquency, addiction, economic dependency, medical and psychiatric problems, and learning capacity, should be explored. A sense-of-the-Congress resolution would remove the excuse that it is not permissible for federally funded research to touch on this aspect of life.

144 George Washington, Farewell Address, September 19, 1796, in *George Washington: A Collection*, ed. W. B. Allen (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Classics, 1988), p. 521.

145 For instance, Congress has been funding only research projects that ignore or bury the effects of religion while scrupulously trying to avoid any initiative that in some way might advance religious belief or practice. This essentially is what has happened in the vast areas of social science research financed by the federal government that is among the work covered in this study.

- ③ **Congress should mandate a census question on religious practice.** The census for the year 2000 ought to ask about frequency of attendance at church or synagogue. It violates nobody's freedom of religion for Congress to know the level and intensity of religious worship in the United States. Also, many of the annual sample surveys conducted by the Bureau of the Census would be significantly better informed if similar information were gathered in those surveys.
- ④ **Congress should commission research on the relationship between regular church attendance and social issues.** This research should focus on the social issues which continue to increase the burden borne by the American taxpayer, including crime, drug use, health of the elderly, out-of-wedlock births, and poverty.
- ⑤ **Congress should fund federal experiments with school choice that include choice of religiously affiliated schools.** To deny financial support to parents who cannot afford to send their children to religiously oriented schools is to deny such education to those children who may need it most and confine it to those rich enough to afford it. The United States of America and the now-defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are the only major modern states to deny funding to faith-based schools.
- ⑥ **The President should appoint, and the Senate should confirm, judges who are sensitive to the role of religion in public life.** Religion should not be crowded out of every activity in which government is involved. And yet, this is precisely what has been happening for the last 30 years as government has encroached more and more on virtually every area of American life: family, school, and marketplace. This does not make sense for any society—and it has weakened ours.

Columnist William Raspberry has put his finger on the problem. In his historic majority opinion in the 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education* case (330 U.S. 1), notes Raspberry, Justice Hugo Black wrote that government is forbidden to "pass laws which aid any religion, aid all religion, or prefer one religion over another."

The first and third elements in the Black proscription seem to me to jibe with the "establishment" clause of the Constitution. The middle one suggests that the only proper position of government is hostility to religion—which seems to be the prevailing view among civil libertarians and a majority of the Supreme Court.¹⁴⁶

This calls to mind the words of the late William O. Douglas, one of the most liberal of Supreme Court Justices, who wrote in the 1950s:

We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being. We guarantee the freedom to worship as one chooses. [When] the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian needs, [it] respects the religious nature of our people and accommodates the public service to their spiritual needs. To hold that it may not would be

146 William Raspberry, "Prevent the Abuse, Preserve the Privilege," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1993, p. A27.

to find in the Constitution a requirement that the government show a callous indifference to religious groups. That would be preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe.¹⁴⁷

The Senate should ask all future candidates for federal court appointments to clarify their opinions regarding both the role of religion in the life of the body politic and their understanding of the Founding Fathers' intent on this issue.

But this problem is far too important to be left to government. America's religious leaders and individual citizens also must act:

- ① **They must draw attention to the enormous and beneficial effects on society of the true practice of religion.** As leaders of the nation's religious communities, they should assert their right to be regarded as critical in the nurturing of stable marriages and healthy families. Religion performs the foundational work that ensures the success of secular society's other four basic institutions: family, school, marketplace, and government.
- ② **They must emphasize the need for religious formation.** While the social works of mercy carried out by religious congregations will be needed more and more to repair the damage from the breakdown of the family, only a religious institution can give a religious orientation to those who are searching for answers to the mysteries of human life: love and suffering in birth, marriage, family life, and death. Religious beliefs help the individual acquire central organizing principles for life and an understanding of God. Aided by this sense and these principles, an individual can avoid the unnecessary suffering that stems from bad choices and attain the benefits that flow from good choices followed steadily through life. Today, schools are forbidden to participate in this critical work. Only religious leaders can provide this all-important service to society.
- ③ **They must take special care of the religious formation of children at risk of losing their faith in God, especially during the transition period from childhood to adolescence.** The empirical research indicates that there is a critical stage in the development of young adults, from around ten years of age through later adolescence, during which they decide whether they will engage in the religious dialogue of searching for ultimate truths and meaning. The young adolescent who turns away from religion at this stage may well lose his anchoring in the community and is at greater risk for a host of problems that can subvert his personal happiness for a lifetime. Increased attention to this aspect of religious ministry will yield great benefits to the nation. Of particular concern to public policy leaders are the problems that plague America's inner cities: out-of-wedlock births, addiction, and crime. These neighborhoods need the benefits of religious belief and practice. They are "mission" territories that beckon loudly.

147 *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, 72 S. Ct. 679, 96 L.Ed 954 (1952).

- ④ **They must use the ability of inner-city churches, especially black churches, to help low-income African-Americans escape from the degrading culture of inner-city poverty.** Many religious leaders, with the best of intentions, have concentrated on the material aspects of their work, forgetting that the most powerful help they can give is in the spiritual dimension, and that this has a significant effect on material well-being. Regular church attendance will do more to help a child get out of poverty than anything else the religious leader can provide. And it will transform the community if most people can be persuaded to become church members.

CONCLUSION

The available evidence clearly demonstrates that regular religious practice is both an individual and social good. It is a powerful answer to many of our most significant social problems, some of which, including out-of-wedlock births, have reached catastrophic proportions. Furthermore, it is available to all, and at no cost.

America is at a crossroads. Political leaders as diverse as President Clinton, Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, and House Speaker Newt Gingrich all have articulated popular concerns and fears about the level of the breakdown of American society.¹⁴⁸ Almost simultaneously, Americans are becoming aware of the fundamental contribution that married family life and regular religious practice can make to preserving that society.

For the sake of the nation's future health, it is time to redirect public policy so that these two vast resources, instead of being weakened further, can be rejuvenated and encouraged. Many of the goals of social policy and social work can be attained, indirectly and powerfully, through the practice of religion. None of this invalidates education or social work, which operate at a different level of the human condition. However, as demands for social work outstrip (and give every indication of far outstripping) social work resources, it is good to know that the practice of religion is a powerful ally.

The practice of religion is good for individuals, families, states, and the nation. It improves health, learning, economic well-being, self-control, self-esteem, and empathy. It reduces the incidence of social pathologies, such as out-of-wedlock births, crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, health problems, anxieties, and prejudices.

The Founding Fathers, in their passionate love of freedom, promoted the freedom of all Americans to practice their religious beliefs, but Congress and the courts have crowded religion out of the public square. It is time to bring it back. Religious practice can and should be factored into the planning and debate on the nation's urgent social problems. Americans cannot build their future without drawing on the strengths that come to them from the practice of their religious beliefs.

The widespread practice of religious beliefs can only benefit the nation, and the task of re-integrating religious practice into American life while protecting and respecting the rights of non-practice—rights that, despite persistent demagoguery on the subject, remain totally

148 See Patrick F. Fagan "Social Breakdown in America," in *Issues '96* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, forthcoming 1996).

unthreatened—is one of the nation's most important tasks. Academics of good will can do much in this area, and history will look kindly on those who help America achieve this wonderful balance.

Patrick F. Fagan
William H.G. FitzGerald Senior Fellow in
Family and Cultural Issues¹⁴⁹

HERITAGE STUDIES ON LINE

Heritage Foundation studies are available electronically at several on-line locations. On the Internet, The Heritage Foundation's world wide web home page address is www.heritage.org.

Heritage studies also are available on CompuServe as part of the Town Hall forum. A joint project of The Heritage Foundation and National Review, Town Hall is a meeting place for conservatives to exchange information and opinions on a wide variety of subjects. For more information on line, type GO TOWNHALL or call 1-800-441-4142.

Subscribers to the NEXIS on-line data retrieval service can find Heritage Foundation Reports (HFRPTS) in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.

149 The author would like to thank Dr. David Larson, President of the National Institute for Healthcare Research, for his generous guidance and assistance in providing much resource material. Robert Klassen, while interning at the Heritage Foundation, was of immense help as my research assistant.