



## MAKING SENSE OF RELIGION IN POLITICAL LIFE

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**Key Words** social movements, culture, identity, resource mobilization, political opportunity structure

■ **Abstract** After a long period of postwar neglect by mainstream scholars, religion assumed a new prominence in political science during the late 1970s. Despite the latter-day significance accorded religion by the discipline, the product of several unexpected real-world events, much of the recent research has focused on specific episodes or groups without drawing on or developing general theories. Social movement theory (SMT), particularly in its most recent incarnation, offers a way to address the three critical questions about religiously engaged political movements: What are the motives for political activity by religious groups? By what means do these groups facilitate political action? What features and conditions of the political system provide them opportunities for effective political action? This review explores various expressions of religiously based political action from the vantage point of SMT. We conclude that the translation of religious grievances into political action is contingent on a string of conditions that involve the interplay of motive, means, and opportunity. The implicit message is that scholars should approach religiously engaged social movements with the same theoretical frameworks used to understand secular political forces and that focusing these interpretive lenses on religion will illuminate issues of general interest to the discipline.

### INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions are neither designed nor intended to mobilize political action. Yet, across the globe, they seem to have done precisely that (see, e.g., Marty & Appleby 1992, Barkun 1994, Rudolph & Piscatori 1997, Hart 2001, Jelen & Wilcox 2002). Rather than receding from the public square in blind obedience to the dictates of secularization theory and the expectations of many social scientists, religion has instead increasingly engaged society and politics (Hadden 1987, Casanova 1994). Some recent agenda-setting works in political science—Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2001), Verba et al.'s *Voice and Equality* (1995)—recognize the religious factor (in various guises)

as a major political force.<sup>1</sup> The American National Election Studies, the mother lode of data for many behavioralists, has repeatedly revised its interview schedule to help scholars get a better purchase on the electoral significance of the religious factor (Leege & Kellstadt 1993).

As much as we welcome the growth of disciplinary interest in the religious factor, the increased attention highlights the need for a stronger infusion of social science theory in this emerging subfield. Despite all the research generated by the relevant disciplines, neither political science nor religious studies has offered a comprehensive explanation for the genesis of religiously based political action. Case studies abound, but there is relatively little cumulative scholarly progress (Jelen 1998). Referring to an outburst of published studies about a social movement during the 1970s, a scholar jokingly suggested renaming the outlet for this research the *British Journal of National Front Studies*. In the same manner, considering much of the published work in recent years, one could justifiably refer to a subfield of Christian Right Studies or fill the pages of a journal devoted solely to fundamentalist Islam. When scholarly inquiry is walled off in specialized research outlets, its practitioners often cease drawing on larger scholarly currents and aiming at the development of general theory. We intend to offer scholars of religion and politics the opportunity to put their research in a framework that speaks to a wider audience of scholars, including many with a only peripheral interest in religion. Our framework also helps make clear that the study of religion in politics presents theoretical concerns similar to those that preoccupy scholars of other fields and subjects.

Specifically, this article draws on three important strands of social movement theory (SMT)—culture/identity, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structure—to identify the forces that account for political engagement by religious groups. Apart from constituting an important and intriguing phenomenon on its own, we argue, religiously based political action is a venue that can enhance our understanding of some perennial political issues.

## BACKGROUND

Although religion has been a constant in human society, political scientists paid scant attention to it until about 20 years ago. Apart from normative theorists and comparativists, most scholars in the discipline regarded religion as too exotic or epiphenomenal to warrant sustained interest.<sup>2</sup> Even when religion was considered

<sup>1</sup>Upon close inspection, Huntington's civilizations are defined largely by their common religious heritage. Putnam argues that religious institutions are the major force that provides American society with social engagement, accounting for fully half the stock of social capital. Similarly, Verba et al. discover that religion is a powerful resource that promotes and encourages political participation, enabling some minorities to overcome deficits in tangible assets such as education and income.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Pals' (1996) account of classic approaches to religion includes profiles of psychologists (e.g., Freud), anthropologists (e.g., Levi Strauss, Geertz), sociologists (e.g., Durkheim), and economists (e.g., Marx), but not a single scholar with a direct link to

in systematic studies of political change, it was largely regarded as a problem in need of a solution. Consider the postwar comparative theorists who, preoccupied with the newly independent states carved out of colonial empires, identified modernization as the desired end product of political development. They defined modernization (in part) as the “separation of the polity from religious structures, substitution of secular modes of legitimation and extension of the polity’s jurisdiction into areas formerly regulated by religion” (Smith 1974, p. 4). By definition, religion was placed in opposition to effective development.<sup>3</sup>

Not until the 1980s, when religion more or less forced itself back onto the mainstream scholarly agenda as a result of several real-world developments, did empirically minded political scientists begin to take seriously what William James once derided as “soul stuff.” With a new appreciation for the political potency of religion, scholars convened specialized conferences and produced countless books, journal articles, and special issues of journals that ranged widely in their focus with regard to place, time, and form of political action.

This resurgence of scholarly interest in the 1980s owes much to an unlikely pair of sources: the late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and the Rev. Jerry Falwell of Lynchburg, Virginia. Both emerged in the 1970s as leaders of social movements that profoundly altered two of the largest subfields in political science—comparative and American politics, respectively. (We may yet come to regard Osama bin Laden as a comparable force for scholarly change in international relations.) The Islamic Revolution that Khomeini symbolized did not merely seize power in one nation; rather, it demonstrated the capacity of a movement rooted in “primordial” social forces to undermine what had been the very model of the modernizing state in the political development literature, the Shah’s Iran. In much the same way, Falwell’s emergence as the public symbol of what became known as the New Christian Right helped scramble the alignments in American party politics. The party system was shaken to its core by a force whose political salience was supposedly on the decline. Although both movements have generated their own Thermidorian reactions, each has left a profound imprint on the political system it challenged. Whatever their attitudes toward religion, political scientists could not avoid taking account of such major shifts in the subjects of their research.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars who approached these phenomena via the collective behavior paradigm, once the dominant approach to mass politics, were ill-prepared to make sense of politically engaged religion. Writing in this tradition, scholars tended to

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political science. Although our discipline draws heavily on these thinkers for inspiration and understanding, it has been more a consumer than a producer of important theoretical frameworks. Even today, it is difficult to find a distinctively “political science” perspective on religion.

<sup>3</sup>Religion was not ruled off the research agenda entirely. It was recognized as a social force that might facilitate mass mobilization, another requisite of effective development.

<sup>4</sup>The strong religious motifs in the Sandinista uprising in Nicaragua and the overt piety of the Solidarity movement in Poland suggested that Iran and the United States were exemplars rather than outliers.

portray mass movements as irrational, dangerous, and socially marginal (Adorno et al. 1950, Kornhauser 1959, Smelser 1963). For example, although he recognized different forms of collective behavior, Smelser (1963) nonetheless found a common syndrome of panic, craze, and hostility at the core of all mass movements (p. 271). When this syndrome was married to the mystical and irrational connotations that religion carried for many social scientists, religiously based mass movements were seldom approached in a nonjudgmental way. Just as explanations of the anticommunist movement in the 1950s and 1960s had emphasized psychological disorders and sociological strains as the motivating force (Bell 1955), some early interpretations of fundamentalist political emergence in the 1980s called on similar dark impulses to account for the Christian Right (e.g., Crawford 1980, Lipset & Raab 1981; for a good summary of that literature, see Wilcox 1992).

The flowering of politically engaged religion coincided with the emergence of an alternative approach to mass politics, a perspective that drew on continental European traditions of social theory. Known generically as social movement theory (SMT), this new approach was deployed initially to account for the civil rights, student, antiwar, feminist, gay rights, and environmental campaigns (e.g., Morris et al. 1992, Meyer & Tarrow 1997). In contrast to the patronizing tone of the older collective behavior literature, SMT theorists generally empathized with their subjects and argued that the popular struggles added to the democratic character of society (Tesh 1984). By treating mass movements as legitimate political participants with reasonable perspectives, the SMT approach seemed better suited than its precursor to account for movements that were durable, rooted in middle-class social networks, highly institutionalized, committed to a range of action repertoires, and prone to making strategic choices from a cost-benefit perspective.

By now a well-established research tradition, SMT provides important clues to the mysteries of religiously based political activity.<sup>5</sup> Most important, the various approaches incorporated under the SMT rubric identify what we consider the central questions that need to be asked in order to account for religion as an idiom of political conflict and offer the potential to treat religiously based movements on their own terms. Like homicide detectives, scholars of religion and politics need to understand motive, means, and opportunity: the motives that draw religious groups into political action, the means that enable the religious to participate effectively, and the opportunities that facilitate their entry into the political system. These are precisely the domains addressed by SMT. To understand how religion influences individual and group preferences and how these preferences generate political grievances, we turn to cultural identity theory. How compelling is culture as a key to understanding why religious organizations engage the political system?

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<sup>5</sup>Similar scholarship has more recently emerged under the rubric of contentious politics literature (e.g., Smith 1996, Aminzade & Perry 2001, McVeigh & Sikkink 2001). This similarity is no surprise given contentious politics' explicit annexation of SMT (McAdam et al. 1996). Because this paper focuses on religion's impact on social movements, we have chosen to situate our discussion in the more specific SMT literature.

After discussing motives, we examine theories of resource mobilization in search of religious organizations' means for political mobilization. What resources do religious organizations marshal that make political mobilization possible? The final ingredient in a comprehensive analysis of political mobilization by religious organizations is exogenous to religious organizations themselves. What types of opportunities must present themselves so that motive and means can congeal into an effective political mobilization? To address this question, the literature on political opportunity structure and contentious politics is consulted.

Despite this division of SMT into motive, means, and opportunity, we do not intend to suggest that the three domains are hermetically sealed. For instance, it is impossible to discuss political means of religious groups without invoking transcendental ideational forces that also serve as a key ingredient in the formation of motive. Moreover, the sacred nature of religious obligations secured through these otherworldly appeals alters the opportunity structures faced by these groups in the public realm. As this overlap suggests, we believe that motive, means, and opportunity are both individually necessary and mutually sufficient to account for the political mobilization of religious organizations.<sup>6</sup>

## MOTIVE: CULTURE AND IDENTITY

For Max Weber, individuals "undoubtedly act on the basis of their beliefs and ideas, and the ways in which they conduct themselves follow from the religious and political conceptions to which they subscribe" (Hughes 1995, p. 90). For Émile Durkheim, the "true purpose" of religion is to serve "as the carrier of social sentiments, providing symbols and rituals that enable people to express the deep emotions which anchor them to their community" (Pals 1996, p. 111). Despite their differences on whether religion should be understood as primarily mental (Weber) or communal (Durkheim), these two giants of social theory concurred that religion is a key determinant of one's "competing notions of how we should and should not live—the moral order" (Leege et al. 2002, p. 13). If religion shapes culture, or is shaped by culture, as Weber and Durkheim respectively suggest, then cultural theory offers an important insight into how religion shapes individual preferences. These preferences combine to form the motive for the political mobilization of religious organizations.

SMT theorists in the United States were relatively slow to focus on culture as the source of mobilization. Early work tended to discuss grievances without much concern about where they came from and to treat as exogenous the social identity

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<sup>6</sup>Despite its explanatory potential, SMT was seldom invoked by the first generation of researchers, who seemed much more comfortable with what they perceived as liberation movements than seemingly reactionary crusades. That inattention to religion is slowly being rectified, but we believe that SMT still overlooks religious movements unless they are defined as progressive. For an exception, see Lo (1992).

that provided the cognitive glue for mass movements. Since the “cultural turn” in SMT research about a decade ago (Johnston & Klandermans 1995), these questions have bulked much larger and provide a take-off point for our discussion of the motives underlying mobilization. The concluding paragraph of this section points out the implications of training a cultural theoretical lens on religious organizations.

Wildavsky (1987) argues that in order to understand the cultural basis of social identity, one should define culture as a compilation of shared values and social relations (p. 5). Culture, as Wildavsky perceives it, performs three functions: it confers identity, prescribes behavioral norms, and maintains boundaries for relationships. That is, cultural identity tells us who we are, how we should behave, and how we should act toward those who are not part of us.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of political science, it is most important that culture molds individual preferences. In understanding this, Wildavsky offers a useful menu metaphor. “Human beings do not choose what they want, like ordering *a la carte*,” he contends. Rather, “[p]reference formation is much more like ordering *prix fixe* from a number of set dinners” (p. 4). A limited number of cultures exist in the real world. Once one has chosen a culture to join, or been chosen by one as the case may be, an infinite number of potential actions get whittled down to those that are culturally rational (p. 6). One’s culture, though not taking away one’s free will completely, directs one’s preferences in such a way as to limit the range of acceptable choices in any given situation.

The intersection of culture with identity and grievance formation is apparent in Wood’s (1999) instructive comparison of two small and homogeneous churches, St. Elizabeth and Full Gospel churches in Oakland, California. Emphasizing the contingent nature of identity formation, the author demonstrates concretely how culture, as conceptualized by Wildavsky, can produce political grievances (motive) in one religious organization while producing quiescence in another. Both churches have active congregations and provide a strong sense of community for their members, but St. Elizabeth’s congregation sees active involvement in community politics as a religious virtue, whereas Full Gospel’s leaders urge congregants toward the unambiguous pursuit of good, which does not readily translate into active involvement in the messy give-and-take of local politics (Wood 1999, pp. 316–21). A black and white moral universe does not provide the necessary cognitive tools to comprehend a political system painted in shades of gray. Because of these churches’ different cultures, it is culturally rational for congregants of St. Elizabeth to show up *en masse* for protest marches to express their political grievances to local officials and for members of Full Gospel to direct “their calls for social change. . . largely at apolitical, other-worldly venues” (p. 327).

The concept of cultural rationality seems jarring, accustomed as we are to understanding rational behavior as instrumental, utility-maximizing action. But

<sup>7</sup>In emphasizing culture as a source of group boundaries, this approach differs from the classic anthropological understanding of culture as the force that unites society. Political conflict is often fueled by competition among subcultures in the same society.

Weber (1968) also spoke of value rationality, action that makes sense to people who are embedded in a subculture that places a premium on behavior that reflects the core norms and values of the group. The behavior of these two congregations is rooted in related but distinct religious subcultures that differ on what kinds of behavior are both appropriate and rewarding. The identity that has been created and fostered at St. Elizabeth's leads, in the right context, to very active forms of political participation. Conversely, the identity at Full Gospel promotes passive and otherworldly political responses, chiefly prayer. In both cases, the identity and context of the religious community has a direct and observable effect on behavioral options.

The larger temporal context also influences whether and how culturally based grievances are politicized. As Swidler (1986) argues, "[C]ulture is a 'tool kit' for constructing 'strategies of action rather than . . . a switchman directing an engine propelled by interests'" (p. 277). Given the aforementioned example of St. Elizabeth and Full Gospel, Swidler would contend that St. Elizabethans can find a tool for stimulating political mobilization in their cultural kit whereas Full Gospelites' tools are unfit for the job. The latter church's symbols and strategies are better equipped for promoting acceptance of authority and creating a morally dichotomous universe. Swidler makes a distinct contribution to cultural theory by distinguishing culture's effects on what she calls settled and unsettled lives (p. 278). The causal connections between culture and action are much harder to deduce in settled cultural periods than in unsettled cultural periods (pp. 278–80).

For example, consider the reactions of church women to patriarchal beliefs, sacred images, language, and practices. Ozorak (1996) finds that common coping mechanisms of females in patriarchal churches in upper-middle-class America include rejection, translation, interpretation, and integration (pp. 17–19). Stated simply, women can leave the church, change the church behaviorally, change the church cognitively, or employ a combination of these latter two approaches. "Settled cultures," explains Swidler (1986), "support varied patterns of action, obscuring cultures' independent influence" (p. 280). It is because the upper-middle-class American women of Ozorak's study are living in a relatively settled culture that she can find a number of subjects who fit into each of her categories. Had the society in question been unsettled culturally, the ambiguity that allows women to comfortably report such things as "I don't say 'Our Father,' I say, 'Our Being, who art in Heaven. . .'" would be greatly diminished (Ozorak 1996, p. 23). In unsettled periods "doctrine, symbol, and ritual shape action" and it would be much harder, particularly in public, for women to reconcile a desire for gender equity with cherished symbols of male domination (Swidler 1986, p. 278).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Demonstrating that the dynamic is not confined to middle-class Protestants in the United States, Williams & Fuentes (2000) provide a rich account of how changes in the social environment affect the action repertoires of poor urban Catholics in Peru. They find that unsettled times encourage a resort to personal, self-help strategies and a turn away from collective, public solutions.

Grievances are infinite, whereas the number of social movements is finite. Hence, grievances cannot be taken for granted as the motive of collective action. Rather, we need to focus on the differential interpretation of culturally based grievances across individuals and, more importantly, across social groups. Borrowing from Goffman, Snow et al. (1986) use the language of framing to refer to “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (p. 464). Their typology of cultural linkages between individuals and organizations recognizes four options, labeled as frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (p. 467). These paths facilitate the transformation of individual grievances into collective action.

Frame bridging occurs when an organization recruits members whose individual cultural preferences resemble the organization’s (Snow et al. 1986, p. 467). Organizations that use frame bridging solve their free-rider problem by offering members cultural, as opposed to material, goods. For example, when Jerry Falwell set out to enlist millions of culturally conservative Christians in his campaign of moral restoration in the late 1970s, he could simply tell them what they had already learned from fundamentalist churches: “[I]f Christ were to return today, he would find ample evidence of moral decay” (Liebman 1983, p. 52). Through grassroots campaigning and a multimedia enterprise, he offered his Moral Majority organization as a vehicle to combat the decay through political action and thus hasten the return of the Messiah. In so doing, Falwell extended an accepted motif from the social to the political realm.

The other three options, as their names imply, involve the amplification, extension, and transformation of motives (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 469–76) rather than a simple bridging between individuals and organizations with like motives. In these cases, organizations gerrymander their cultural message in order to attract a broader following. If successful, they will increase their membership base while pursuing the narrower cultural agenda of the organization’s founders. If they are unsuccessful, membership will decline or stagnate and/or the organization’s original political agenda will be replaced by one acceptable to the new adherents but unacceptable to the old (p. 476). Using the Moral Majority example, one can read between the lines to find potential examples of frame amplification, extension, and transformation. Frame amplification: The Moral Majority promoted Christian identity over class, racial, national, gender, and occupational identity because the Christian identity is more inclusive than the rich, white, American, male, Independent Baptist pastor identity. Frame extension: To attract a pool of racially conservative Americans who do not necessarily associate strongly with their religious identity, the Moral Majority encouraged the American government to support the Christian government of Rhodesia (whites) against the atheistic Marxist freedom fighters (blacks).<sup>9</sup> Frame transformation: The Moral Majority was a fundamentally right-wing organization that used the call of Christianity to inculcate and politicize a generation of

<sup>9</sup>On the power of race as a reference group in this context, see Hill (1993).

social conservatives. If any of these characterizations are accurate, one can make a compelling case that the Moral Majority motivated political action in individuals whose cultural values were not necessarily consonant with the organization's explicit religious mission.

Per the example of Falwell, elites are the critical actors in recontextualizing cultural components to allow for ideational mobilization. This observation draws heavily on the familiar political science understanding of elites as issue and interest entrepreneurs, a theme that recurs in a wide variety of political settings where religion has been politically mobilized. It makes sense to think of grievances as latencies, tools that are available for exploitation by strong or aspiring leadership. Three very different cases illustrate how elites facilitate the political expression of cultural values by deploying religious symbols and themes.

In stable polities, the politicization of group identity by elites has often driven partisan electoral strategies. Although culture, broadly speaking, may unite us, subcultures possess distinctive moral orders that help campaign organizations divide us (the electorate) into majority and minority coalitions. As Legee et al. (2002) document, the postwar electoral strategy of the major American parties was characterized by attempts to shape the electorate with appeals to deep-seated cultural values rooted in social group identifications. In their effort to build a new majority coalition, Republicans targeted various groups of wavering Democrats for both demobilization (abstention) and conversion (ticket splitting). They identified fault lines in society based on race, patriotism, gender, and religion; found symbols that appeared to demonstrate that the Democrats had abandoned core values; and created powerful emotional appeals that often bore impressive electoral fruit. Fears about "the other" in the form of communists, blacks, militant feminists, gays, and secularists became the late-twentieth-century equivalent of the Civil War era's "bloody shirt."

Recent tumult in Côte d'Ivoire provides another case in which elites effectively politicized religious and cultural grievances in the service of other goals. When Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire's leader since independence, died in the early 1990s, his successor began to enunciate the xenophobic theory of *Ivoirité* to justify his leadership. Initially this message implicitly aimed to unite "indigenous" groups loyal to the regime against "foreigners." By the time Laurent Gbagbo came to power, the dichotomy underlying *Ivoirité* was well understood as one pitting the predominately Christian south against the predominately Muslim north. By emphasizing north versus south and Christian versus Muslim, Gbagbo effectively undercut his most feared political rival, the Muslim Alassane Ouattara. When the Côte d'Ivoire's civil war broke out in late 2002, the head of state emphasized an explicit Us/Them rhetoric that caricatured Muslims in the north as "*talibans ivoiriens*" (Soudan 2003). Religious appeals were the idiom of a conflict that had multiple dimensions.

The same dynamic appears to operate when religion crosses state boundaries and becomes entwined with terrorist acts. The terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, appear to be related to the identity-based grievances of the al Qaeda martyrs,

which included the corruption of Islam, its siege by western powers, and the lack of an Islamically acceptable society and polity. Similarly, the terrorism of Eric Robert Rudolph, the presumed Centennial Park bomber also arrested for several abortion clinic bombings, drew on his immersion in Christian Identity, the American Patriot Movement, and the extremist wing of the prolife movement. This identity calls for the dismantling of the federal government; the social, political, and economic protection of white Christians; and the return of the majority of political power to the local level of government (Aho 1991, Barkun 1994). Moreover, it recontextualizes familiar parts of American social, religious, political, and economic culture in a manner that justifies white supremacy and antigovernment sentiment. The identity acquired from this milieu virtually forced on Rudolph a sense of responsibility and obligation to hold the government accountable for its actions (Silverman 2002a).

Elite-driven recontextualization is present in the *shahadat* and jihadist operations of reactionary Islamic revivalists and the Christian Identity behavior of Rudolph. Reactionary Islamic leaders, such as Osama bin Laden, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, and many others, have argued in private and public statements that Islam is under attack, that Muslims are at risk, and that the behavior of the United States and other western/non-Muslim states recalls earlier episodes when Islam was threatened. From this context arise the references to westerners as “the Crusaders” and the lionization of “martyrs” who engage in behavior otherwise forbidden to Muslims. During his socialization, Rudolph was exposed to apocalyptic literature such as William Pierce’s *The Turner Diaries*, a fictional account of a “patriot” revolution against the tyrannical U.S. government. In the same way that Hamas has made a cult of suicide bombing, Christian Identity and extremist prolife movements have used Rudolph as an exemplar. He is portrayed as a Christian patriot who is now the political prisoner of an ungodly state that butchers babies as part of Satan’s plan to destroy America. By remaking Rudolph and numerous Islamically motivated terrorists as ideational examples to be emulated, the leadership of these movements helps motivate the next generation of actors.

By referring to grievances as the trigger for political mobilization, we mean to suggest that religious groups seldom enter the political realm driven primarily by abstract motivations to improve the world or otherwise achieve heaven on earth. No doubt such efforts exist—exemplified by Christian Reconstructionism, a movement that seeks to remake all of American society in its image of a biblical commonwealth (Barron 1992)—and groups may well understand and justify their political efforts in such spiritual terms. But we do not believe that the language of such movements accurately reflects the principal source of political engagement. As a rule, we believe, this kind of mobilization is reactive: Groups respond to what they perceive as social flaws, attacks on sacred values, and anti-religious practices. The tone is often defensive as religious elites declare that they are forced to intervene in politics so that their members can live godly lives. We sometimes forget that groups may suffer costs by virtue of political action and that it would often be easier to forego such action in favor of tending to hearth and home.

Typically, some trigger issue is required to overcome the tendency to focus on more immediate religious concerns.

Although it is certainly “*unreasonable* to neglect the study of why people want what they want,” the level of abstraction involved in the study of preferences is far higher than that involved in the study of either organizational resource mobilization or political opportunity structures (Wildavsky 1987, p. 3). The above discussion began by linking religion to culture understood as shared values and social relations. Despite their differing conceptions of religion, both Weber and Durkheim make this connection in their work on religion. Cultures come with built-in moral orders and are sensitive to the violation of norms and mores. “Religion adds both a transcendent and immanent supernatural dimension to identity, norms, and boundaries,” goes the recurring theme enunciated by Legee et al. (2002), “and is therefore a powerful instrument for persuasion” (p. 45). Alert to the mobilizing potential inherent in cultural tensions and conflicts, political elites may and often do exploit grievances as part of their quest for power and authority. In that process, the religious grievances amplified by religiopolitical entrepreneurs are constituted as the political motives of mobilized religious groups.

## MEANS: RESOURCES

As we noted in the previous section, grievances are not automatically politicized, and an increase in the scope or intensity of dissatisfaction does not invariably translate into more active attempts at resolution. According to resource mobilization theory, the strength of the link between grievances and effective political action depends mainly on the organizational capacity of groups seeking change.<sup>10</sup> Resources are absolutely necessary for a successful social movement, religious or otherwise, and they vary in form, quality, and quantity from movement to movement. Labor unions, parent-teacher organizations, rebel armies, and local churches have all been mobilized politically in the past, but the resources each group marshaled have differed considerably. In the following discussion of resource mobilization in religious organizations, we emphasize five distinct modes of resource: culture, leadership, material resources, communication networks, and space. Although these categories are reminiscent of Zald & McCarthy’s (1979) more generalized work on resource mobilization, we pay special attention to the unique access religious organizations have to these means. In stressing the resource advantages available to religious organizations, it is important to bear in mind that these assets

<sup>10</sup>SMT and resource mobilization are sometimes portrayed as contending approaches. SMT is often championed by scholars who feel that collective behavior research overemphasizes organizational resources. Nevertheless, we believe that resource mobilization, like political opportunity theory, should be considered a part of the SMT family, a specialized body of theory that helps explain the transformation of grievances into organizational form. We see the approaches as complementary rather than competitive.

may backfire and handicap movements as they engage society. Discussion of their utility must not overlook their nature as double-edged swords.<sup>11</sup>

The discussion of resources in SMT usually emphasizes tangible or material assets available to social groups. When the discussion turns to religiously based social movements, it is equally important to consider ideas as a means of mobilization. As discussed in the preceding section, religious organizations are both creators and maintainers of culture. In considering culture as a motive for political engagement, we focus on its capacity to define identity and provide meaning, frames of understanding, so that people interpret their situation in a certain way. Beyond providing a motive for political engagement, culture may enable religious organizations to exert on their members pressure unimaginable in most secular organizations. When culture legitimates shared values that claim divine origin, it drapes a powerful sacred canopy over the sometimes banal, sometimes brutal work involved in political mobilization. Describing the Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s, Salehi (1996) notes that “[t]he Islamic groups had thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of fully devoted individuals under their command.” This devotion, Salehi continues, went so far as to incorporate martyrdom, “a concept that had become an internalized ideal” (p. 51). Although a social movement need not be religious for activists to be willing to lay down their lives in pursuit of its goals, divine sanction adds to these movements a transcendent nature. In a shared religious community, Legee & Kellsted (1993) contend, “[p]eople become empowered, they develop the capacity to *act in concert*” (pp. 9–10). Whereas individuals tend to be risk-averse about challenging the government in general, a sense of belonging to a sacred community can alleviate the free-rider problem and embolden individuals to act in ways that may appear individually irrational outside the religiocultural context.

Although culture is a resource that religious groups may exploit successfully, as the Ayatollah Khomeini and his Shia advisors did in Iran, it does have potential political drawbacks. In culturally and/or religiously diverse societies, cultural resources may be extremely divisive. The civil rights campaign in the 1960s illustrates this point well. For a brief period in the early 1960s, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. managed not only to incite members of his congregation to campaign for civil rights but also to draw a diverse group of individuals, white and black, into his movement. Among the most influential members of this coalition were the white leaders of the National Council of Churches, who cajoled midwestern

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<sup>11</sup>In one of the very few attempts to balance the pros and cons of clerical influence on black politics, Reed (1986) emphasizes the down side to ministerial leadership in politics. He argues that ministers by their nature are given to an authoritarian leadership style that discourages the development of democratic habits and inhibits the emergence of other leadership sectors in the black community. The scandals that have engulfed a number of prominent political ministries, Jesse Jackson’s included, also suggest that lack of accountability may encourage excess and rebound against political movements that are hitched to religious stars.

legislators to support the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Findlay 1990, p. 67). Later in the 1960s, James Foreman called on these same individuals to demand \$500 million in "reparations." His demand was met with a terse rebuff as white mainline churches quickly retreated to their familiar, uninvolved stance on "race questions" (p. 92), where they remain more than a quarter century later. Certainly Foreman's move may have been politically beneficial in that it brought recognition to his cause, but it inhibited political mobilization by lopping off important components of what had been an effective coalition.

The most effective social movement organizations often owe their success to astute leadership. In their study of "Race, Ethnicity and Political Resources," Verba et al. (1993) discover statistically what observers of the American civil rights movement already knew well anecdotally: black Protestant churches can be remarkably effective incubators of political leadership (p. 482). Morris (1996) deduces two reasons for this state of affairs. First, he argues, blacks denied access to mainstream institutions turned to the church to fill a void. "Behind the church doors," Morris contends, "was a friendly and warm environment where black people could be temporarily at peace with themselves while displaying their talents and aspirations before an empathetic audience" (pp. 29–30). Motivated African-Americans saw, and continue to see, a relative dearth of role models in national and local government. Minority churches, however, provide a wealth of examples of African-American leadership. Because many of their congregations are predominately, if not exclusively, black, African-Americans fill every post from minister to choir director, from facilities manager to Sunday school teacher. Second, Morris contends, "[c]hurches, especially the prestigious or leading ones, demanded ministers who could command the respect, support, and allegiance of congregations through their strong, magnetic personalities" (p. 31). There is a great deal of overlap in the skill sets required behind the pulpit and the political podium. Church leaders are not only given a position of authority but are also forced to demonstrate a capacity to lead on a weekly basis.

Like culture, the resource of leadership in religious organizations is not unequivocally useful as a means of political mobilization. Two striking examples of the inability of religious leadership to translate itself into positive political resources are Jerry Falwell's infamous 9/11 comments (Harris 2001) and the Full Gospel pastor's attempt at community organization, discussed above. Used to speaking in terms of good and evil to a like-minded audience, the charismatic Falwell used the tragedy of September 11 to reiterate his familiar political mantra, namely that people who are not conservative Christians are ruining America. He held liberals, gays, prolife groups, civil libertarians, and others to blame for God's decision to withdraw the cloak of protection surrounding the United States, permitting the hijackers to do their work. His message not only fell on largely unsympathetic ears but also managed to push the Thomas Road Baptist Church further away from mainstream values. The leadership style that made him the master of a media empire proved an ineffective resource for political mobilization in that political climate. As for the pastor at Full Gospel, his message consistently urges his parishioners to fight off

evil. This unwavering method confers job security, as evidenced by his long tenure, but leaves little room for the moral flexibility needed to mobilize politically on issues that are technical in nature and not clear cases of good versus evil. When it came time to “Tak[e] the City for Jesus Christ,” Full Gospel’s pastor was unable to lead his congregation into the political fray because his charismatic authoritarian style, well-suited for the pulpit, proved unable to deal with the arena’s inherent ambiguity (Wood 1999, p. 319). Both of these styles of leadership are effective at promoting a certain type of in-group behavior. The identity-rooted messages are an excellent means of “boundary maintenance.” The problem is that although the in-group may be mobilized and even attempt to take action, it is mobilized against several out-groups, which are put on guard by the original attempt at mobilization. The result is a draw at best, as out-group responses, not to mention the larger societal rejection, prevent the in-group from accomplishing its goals.<sup>12</sup>

Material resources are perhaps the type of resource least differentiated by the religious context. Regardless of the social movement, material resources are necessary to “pay organizers, rent office space, print flyers, make telephone calls, send direct mail appeals, construct banners and placards, transport protesters to protests, bail demonstrators out of jail, attract the attention of the media, and offset the costs of boycotts, strikes, and sanctions” (Smith 1996, p. 14). Although the millions of dollars donated to the Moral Majority by wealthy businessmen are certainly a striking example of a religious organization’s capacity for accumulating wealth, that is far from the norm (Liebman 1983, p. 51). The example of the Anglican Church of Kenya (CPK) during the Moi regime is far more typical (Friedman 1996). Combining the tithing (both money and time) resources of thousands of relatively poor Kenyans with token support from the international Anglican Church, CPK managed to circumvent corrupt and often unaccommodating government channels to provide jobs, meeting places, education, health facilities, and a telephone to the residents of Murang’a in West Central Kenya (pp. 387–89). Because CPK Murang’a had a politically diverse congregation, these material resources were not applied in a unidirectional political movement. Nevertheless, political opposition groups found CPK Murang’a a safe place to recruit members because the government, which was not providing public services or jobs to many congregants, had little recourse within church walls (p. 392).

“[M]ovement success,” as Liebman (1983) explains a lesson learned from the Moral Majority, “depends on an extensive network of communications between

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<sup>12</sup>Religiously based social movements seem to have the greatest success when they persuade believers that political action is a religious duty, i.e., when they engage in successful frame bridging. Attempts to draw on religious legitimation for political ends may backfire when members of the religious community do not see the political program as a valid expression of religious purpose. When clergy from mainline Protestant denominations asserted a biblical basis for their positions on such disparate controversies as open housing, the Vietnam War, and farm worker rights in the 1960s and 1970s, many parishioners rejected the linkage and drove the social justice advocates from the pulpit (Hadden 1969).

organizers and constituents” (p. 56). Compared to nonreligious social movements, religious organizations have a real organizational advantage in communication. “Scholars of the church have consistently noted,” for example, “how rapidly and efficiently information is transmitted to the black community from the pulpit” (Morris 1996, p. 33). At least at the level of congregation, churches have regular weekly meetings to disseminate information from the leadership to the masses. Even if this information is not overtly political, latent political messages creep into sermons, and occasionally less covert messages work their way into services. An example of this latter tendency arises in the case of the Anglican church of Kenya. Through subversive songs referring to the “glorious days of the past” when Kenyatta was president and the Mau Mau were waging war from the hills, Kikuyu-speakers managed to vocalize their political discontent through worship (Friedman 1996, p. 391).

Although still a useful means for political mobilization, religious communication networks may begin to lose their potency beyond the congregational level. The functioning of the Moral Majority provides an example of this diminished capacity. Using interpersonal relationships within the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the movement cobbled together a number of influential Independent Baptist churches from across the country. Initially, this amalgamation of mega-churches cut an impressive figure on the national political scene with its 2.5-million-member mailing list (Liebman 1983, p. 61). Soon, however, the autonomy of the Moral Majority’s member institutions began to show. State chapters and even individual churches readily expressed their independence when congregations called for one issue or another to gain ascendance on the local political agenda. Undoubtedly the Moral Majority represents the extreme case in that it was constructed of congregations with a long history of independence, but the diminished capacity of communication networks when one moves from the congregation level to national bodies is a reality even for religions with a hierarchical tradition (see Byrnes 1991, p. 50).

Of all the resources discussed in this section, political “space” most strikingly differentiates religiously oriented political movements from their secular counterparts. “[C]hurches,” notes Gautier (1998), “have probably the greatest possibility of autonomous existence in civil society, outside the realm of direct influence by the state” (p. 291). In the months leading up to the Iranian revolution, Shiia leaders were on the front lines of antigovernment protests, and mosques served as the meeting place for government opposition (Salehi 1996, p. 51). Just prior to the dismantling of South Africa’s apartheid state, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Frank Chikane were firing verbal salvos at the Nationalist Party’s legitimacy and Anglican churches were serving as *de facto* opposition headquarters (Borer 1996, p. 137). Why, one might ask, in such diverse contexts, were religious leaders and buildings spared the harshest treatment of oppressive regimes? Space is the answer.

Had either the Shah or De Klerk brought the full brunt of their security apparatuses to bear on the aforementioned religious institutions, they would have faced an almost certainly fatal backlash. If the military had not turned their weapons on their

leaders, the masses likely would have. One cannot attack a people's God without incurring their fiercest wrath. All but the most desperate governments grant a certain leeway to religious leaders, a freedom that is not afforded their secular equivalents. Religious organizations can use this leeway, as the Ayatollah and South African Council of Churches did, to act politically where few others dare tread. Similarly, by bombing churches in an attempt to forestall the civil rights movement, white racists instead provided an otherwise unenthusiastic federal government a reason to intervene in southern politics (Chalmers 2003).

Space is likely to be particularly critical when religiously based social movements can draw on an international civil society for legitimacy and more tangible forms of support. The churches that led the way in challenging apartheid could draw on a global network of allies to put additional pressure on the regime when it trespassed on sacred space (Warr 1999). Through the antiracism programs of the National and World Councils of Churches, parishioners in North America were enlisted (not always willingly) in the struggles of black South Africans. Elsewhere in Africa, local clerics who battled oppressive states on behalf of parishioners received important support from the human rights campaign championed by the Vatican (Hanson 1987). On the other side of the political spectrum, the anticommunist movements associated with evangelical Protestantism in places such as Nicaragua and the People's Republic of China benefited from the moral and material support provided by their coreligionists in North America (Buss & Herman 2003).

## OPPORTUNITY

Social movements do not exist in a political vacuum where range of motion is unobstructed and all choices are equally sound. Instead, they arise and act in a political environment full of formal and informal structures that provide both incentives and disincentives for political mobilization. Not surprisingly, political scientists have made their greatest contribution to SMT by highlighting the importance of the state and political conditions to the emergence and success of movements (McAdam 1982, Tarrow 1994). Rather surprisingly, students of religiously based political mobilization have not rushed to apply the insights of this literature to their subjects. This section illustrates the potential contribution of this research to help us understand which movements flourish and which languish.

Contingencies of time and place matter greatly for the evolution of social movements with a religious base. Drawing on Tarrow (1994), scholars have suggested that collective mobilization is most likely when (a) access to institutional participation has begun to open up, (b) political alignments are in disarray and new realignments have not yet been formed, (c) challengers can take advantage of major conflicts within the political elite, and (d) challengers are aided by influential allies within or outside of the system (Steigenga & Coleman 1995, p. 467).

The remainder of this section addresses each of these criteria in turn and describes their impact on the role of Chilean Protestants in the Allende and Pinochet regimes (Steigenga & Coleman 1995), U.S. Catholic voting patterns in the 1960s (Byrnes 1991), abortion politics in the United States and Canada (Tatalovich 1995), and black South Africans' struggle to abolish apartheid (Borer 1996), respectively.

Given the same sets of motives and means in different contexts, religious organizations are more apt to mobilize politically in a democratic and open political system than in a closed, authoritarian system. Although this antecedent stipulation is admittedly artificial in that motives and means of organizations are likely to differ significantly between these regime types, the point remains valid. Here the case of Protestant mobilization in Chile between 1972 and 1991 is instructive. Steigenga & Coleman (1995) find that "[l]ower class Protestants moved leftward when opportunities for political participation opened up in the late 1960s, and retreated into conservatism or quiescence during the repressive Pinochet period" (p. 465). This thesis is consistent with Tarrow's hypothesis. When Chile was a democracy, religious groups, including Protestants, mobilized to address political concerns with government officials. They found "ways to attend to material concerns on this earth via political action, while waiting for the imminent return of Jesus Christ" (Steigenga & Coleman 1995, p. 480). When Chile was a military dictatorship, religious groups, especially Protestants, acquiesced. This reaction to the change in political opportunity structure, according to Steigenga & Coleman, "appears to represent one logical strategy for survival in the face of a highly repressive regime" (p. 481).

Uncertain political alignments produce situations ripe for political mobilization. Opposing political camps jockey for support wherever they can find it when constituencies once considered unattainable or solidly supportive are perceived as up-for-grabs. In such a scenario, religious groups seeking to have grievances addressed are more likely to find political accommodation. Such was the case for American Catholics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, with prodding from the Church hierarchy in the form of the Second Vatican Council, American priests went out into their communities to speak to the broader American public about the legal and moral failings of a national policy legalizing abortion (Byrnes 1991, pp. 56–57). Given the centrality of the issue of abortion on the Vatican's political agenda, certainly many of these priests would have championed the "right-to-life" cause regardless of whether politicians took them seriously. Yet without the political fluidity that made Catholics a target for political conversion, their religiopolitical movement would have been conducted in relative obscurity.

Seeing potential weaknesses in the Democrats' New Deal coalition, Republicans were able to pick off Southerners in the 1968 presidential elections and set their sights on Catholics in 1972 (Byrnes 1991, p. 63). They needed Catholic support, one theory goes, "in order to refute the notion that Nixon had formed his new coalition by cynically appealing to the baser motives of Southern whites" (p. 65). Preaching to congregations that strongly supported the Democratic Party despite its ardently prochoice stance on abortion, the Catholic hierarchy was not averse

to political wooing. The Republican Party capitalized on uncertain political alignments by pushing an antiabortion program to the center of its socially conservative agenda. At least partially as a result of these efforts, Catholic voters gave Nixon a comfortable majority of their vote in 1972 (p. 65). To summarize, the disarray of political alignments in the late 1960s allowed Republicans to capture a base of political support (Catholics) that had once been solidly Democratic. These uneasy alignments also allowed the Catholic hierarchy to move a nationally unpopular platform (the right-to-life cause) onto a major party's agenda.

As illustrated by comparative analysis of abortion politics in the United States and Canada (Schwartz 1981, Tatalovich 1995), the root of elite conflict may be structural in nature. In Canada's parliamentary system, where parties have significantly more formal and informal powers of persuasion than their American counterparts have, there are fewer points of view showcased on the national political scene (Tatalovich 1995, p. 7). Pro-life and pro-choice groups have found much more support on Capitol Hill than on Parliament Hill. The evidence suggests that electoral and legislative structures in the United States encourage a divided elite whereas Canadian structures diminish elite conflict. In the United States, junior representatives and backbenchers may find it politically desirable to champion emotionally charged, unbargainable religious issues supported by small minority groups. Such a move will not only bring publicity and name recognition but may also be seen by constituents as a moral local politician standing up to an amoral and unwieldy leviathan in Washington. In Canada, parliamentarians interested in a political career are encouraged to toe the company line and avoid taking politically costly zero-sum stances. Social movements that champion nationally unpopular causes find few, if any, politically elite supporters in such a setting. This reinforces the prediction that conflicts within the political elite will provide opportunities for social movements to act politically.<sup>13</sup>

The final piece of the political opportunity structure to be discussed here is the assistance of influential allies. This type of political opportunity can easily be misconceptualized as a political resource or means: the commodity of friends in high places. Such a conception would, however, be missing an important distinction. Political means are endogenous resources to a social movement. Political opportunities are exogenous resources. Although the support and encouragement of allies may contribute greatly to an organization's ability to collectively mobilize, allies no more belong to politically mobilized organizations than do openings in participation, alignments in disarray, or elite conflicts.

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<sup>13</sup>Moreover, the lack of opportunity for dealing with the issue of abortion in Canada has resulted in significantly lower levels of abortion-related violence there. It seems that the frustration that results from the U.S. pro-life movement's inability to effectively capitalize on the political opportunity surrounding the issue of abortion, a frustration that seems to lead to fairly high levels of political violence, does not exist in Canada. In this instance, lack of opportunity means lack of frustration at the failure to bring about effective change on the issue. This seems to inhibit extreme behavior.

Consider the case of religious leaders' roles in South Africa's antiapartheid movement. By the time the apartheid oligarchy was finally toppled in 1994, black residents of South Africa had been fighting an oppressive and racist state apparatus for centuries. For most of this period, these freedom fighters had few influential allies either domestic or international. The political opportunity structure changed dramatically in the 1980s, however, when such groups as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) openly joined the antiapartheid campaign alongside social movement organizations such as the African National Congress (Borer 1996, p. 125). Previously, many religious leaders in these two institutions had found the segregationist policies of the South African government morally distasteful, but they remained politically inactive. Increasing intensity of opposition to the government and a reciprocal intensification of state oppression made this silence untenable (p. 126). By the mid-1980s, South African clergy and their transnational support agencies were regularly publishing antiapartheid statements, traveling the world to seek international condemnation of apartheid, and calling for a regime change (pp. 131–35). Many factors eventually undermined apartheid, but South Africa's clergy were essential to the cause of the black majority.

Like the famous dog that did not bark, enabling Sherlock Holmes to solve a mystery, the importance of the opportunity structure may be most evident in cases when religious groups fail to mobilize politically despite propitious motives and resources. In the case of Mexico's Catholic Church, anticlerical provisions of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 firmly closed the opportunity structure for confessional politics (Metz 1992). Punished for its long-time alliance with the landholding oligarchy, the Church was expressly forbidden to engage in political life by a series of draconian enactments that disenfranchised the clergy, appropriated all church property to the state, prohibited church operation of schools, and otherwise narrowed the permissible scope of church involvement with society. More than half a century passed before most of these provisions were relaxed, facilitating a political witness by the Church. The salience of opportunity for successful mobilization is made even clearer by the fate of Algeria's Islamist movement, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Since the beginning of democratization in the late 1980s, the social movement represented by the FIS had quietly built up a strong base of popular support by providing a broad array of social services and addressing human needs far more effectively than the sagging state bureaucracy (Entelis 2001). The initial round of voting in parliamentary elections late in 1991 suggested the FIS would soon emerge as the majority party and take the reins of central government, displacing the secular regime that had governed Algeria since independence. Unwilling to accept a religious state, the military stepped in with a coup d'état on behalf of the secular political elites who were on the verge of dispossession by the Islamic movement. The elections were canceled, a civilian government was installed, and all traces of political Islam were ruthlessly suppressed. When the guarantors of the election, France and the United States, refused to intervene, the FIS had lost its opportunity. With the political opening now firmly closed, the FIS

split into the mainstream religious opposition movement and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a full-fledged insurgent/terrorist movement. As Mexico and Algeria attest, the degree of political openness contributes to shaping both the degree and form of religiously based political mobilization.

## CONCLUSION

The sheer diversity of religious expression in politics precludes any single-factor model of broad applicability. Over the past two decades, we have witnessed religiously based political action overthrow seemingly entrenched dictatorial regimes, impose theocratic states, seek freedom for oppressed minorities, and reinforce the dominance of specific social groups. Virtually every major and many minor religious traditions have been mined for their political utility in nations old and new, economically advanced and desperately poor, core and peripheral to the global order. The mode of this action has varied from quiet and worshipful petitioning of the state to violent terrorist assaults that left thousands dead and wounded.

This explosion of interest in religion contrasts sharply with its long neglect by the discipline of political science. Although we believe this attention is warranted and long overdue, the new attentiveness brings challenges of its own. In particular, we have argued, the ubiquity of religion as a political force may convey the impression that religious engagement with politics is the norm, natural or, at least, unproblematic. In fact, there is no necessary linkage between religious communities and political action. For that linkage to be forged, three conditions must be satisfied. Religious groups must come to consider political action as a sacred obligation, draw on various internal resources to prosecute that action, and confront a political environment that may hinder such efforts. Because of their comprehensive nature, we argue, the various branches of social movement theory (SMT) offer a unique framework by which to understand how religiously based organizations negotiate the steps that lead to political engagement.

SMT is particularly well suited to emphasize the contingency of the nexus between religion and politics. Although each major component of the theory may help us comprehend a different dimension of mobilization, all three are required to transform religious sentiment into an effective political presence. Mobilization is not guaranteed by the existence of grievances, by organizational capacity, or by a political system that invites groups into the zone of contention. Rather, all three must be present before religiously grounded grievances are translated into effective political action.

We hope this sense of contingency will guide subsequent work on the political activity of religious groups. There is nothing natural or inevitable about religious activity in political life or about the manner in which religion expresses itself politically. Religion may be active or quiescent, supportive or subversive of the dominant order. The path depends on the contingent conditions we have identified throughout this essay. Religious activists often assert with naive self-confidence

that their faith dictates a certain political stance. In truth, most religious traditions contain rich and nuanced bodies of doctrine that can be mined to support a wide variety of political positions. What interests us is not the political message supposedly embedded in a religious tradition—a construct whose innate existence we doubt—but rather the inherently subjective social processes that prompt people to understand their tradition in a certain way. The Exodus metaphor of the Hebrew Bible can be invoked as a call to challenge society, the predominant motif encountered in Christian tradition (Walzer 1985), or, as one of us once heard in a Baptist congregation, as a justification for building a physical wall around the church grounds. Jihad may be understood either as a call for self-purification, a struggle between the solitary believer and Allah, or as the rationale for a crusade against unbelievers (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996, Silverman 2002b). Religious traditions are interpreted, contextualized, framed, and taught in the service of many political goals. Ideas matter, but the manner in which they are understood, acted on, and received by the broader society is the critical problem for social scientists who want to grasp the political dimension of religion.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without in any way implicating them, we thank our colleagues Philip J. Williams and Jennifer Hochschild for helping us sharpen our focus.

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