

The Market for Martyrs

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Abstract

Despite its presence within all religious traditions, extreme self-sacrifice is by no means easy to explain. We rightly view most people who seek pain or death as mentally ill. Yet studies refute the seemingly obvious conclusion that *religious* self-sacrifice is likewise rooted in depression, obsession, or other forms of irrationality. Economic theory suggests ways in which many forms of sacrifice (such as restrictive diet, dress, and sexual conduct) can help groups produce collective goods and services otherwise lost to free-riding, but self-sacrifice aimed at injuring others has yet to be adequately explained.

Injury-oriented sacrifice can be modeled as a market phenomenon grounded in exchanges between a relatively small supply of people willing to sacrifice themselves and a relatively large number of “demanders” who benefit from the sacrificers’ acts. Contrary to popular perception, it is on account of limited *demand* rather than limited supply that markets for “martyrs” so rarely flourish. Suicidal attacks almost never profit the groups best equipped to recruit, train, and direct the potential martyrs.

Once established, however, a market for martyrs is hard to shut down. Supply-oriented deterrence has limited impact because:

- In every time, place, and culture, many people are willing to die for causes they value.
- Policies that target current supplies of martyrs induce rapid substitution toward new and different types of potential martyrs.

Demand-oriented deterrence has greater long-run impact because:

- The people who sacrifice their lives do not act spontaneously or in isolation. They must be recruited, and their sacrifices must be solicited, shaped, and rewarded in *group* settings.
- Only very special types of groups are able to produce the large social-symbolic rewards required to elicit suicide.
- Terrorist “firms” must overcome numerous internal and external threats, and even when successful they have trouble “selling” their services.
- Numerous social, political, and economic pathologies must combine in order to maintain the profitability of (and hence the underlying demand for) suicidal attacks.

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The horrific attacks of September 11, 2001 left scholars, journalists, and the general public struggling to make sense of suicide terrorism. As the essays of this volume emphasize, the seemingly obvious explanations miss the mark. Contrary to the initial claims of pundits and politicians, the typical suicide bomber is neither poor nor ignorant; he has no history of mental illness or attempted suicide; he is not especially aggressive or desperate; and he has no special reason to hate his victims.¹ Exceptional rates of poverty, ignorance, grievance, oppression, or hatred likewise fail to predict when and where the attacks originate.

Social scientists have drawn upon many methods and disciplines to better understand this most deadly way of dying. But religion remains at best the secondary focus of their work. In light of the terrorists' obsession with religious beliefs, behavior, and assurances, this tendency is hard to justify. It also is unnecessary, inefficient, and misleading.² Over the past two generations, social scientists have learned a great deal about religious extremism. From hundreds of case studies and scores of surveys, sociologists have amassed numerous empirical generalizations about so-called "cults," "sects," and "fundamentalisms." More recently, economists have developed theories that explain these findings in terms of rational choice, collective production, and market structure. Together, these two bodies of research have much to tell us about suicide bombing and related forms of militancy.

My first challenge is to link the lessons of generic religious extremism to the exceptional case of violent extremism. The link is far from obvious; for despite the prevalence of extremism in all religious traditions, the vast majority of extremists do no harm, and often much good. Religious extremism typically manifests itself in distinctive dress and grooming, restrictive diet, perpetual poverty, ceaseless worship, communal living, rigorous chastity, liberal charity, and aggressive proselytizing. Such behavior may strike outsiders as bizarre and irritating, or even fanatical and illegal, but rarely is any violence involved, much less murder. As we shall see, however, extremist groups of all kinds display similar attributes, experience similar problems, and adopt similar strategies.

My second challenge is to embed the sociological insights regarding extremism and extremist groups within a "market for martyrs" – an economic framework that helps us understand why (and when and where) violent extremism develops, how it is sustained, why it has proved difficult to defeat, and why it arises so rarely. Although this market operates in accordance with standard economic principles, it bears limited resemblance to most previously-explored economic models of crime, suicide, hatred, war, terrorism, or commercial activity.³

Lessons from the Sociology of Religion

Studies of so-called “cults” supply numerous examples and generalizations relevant to all deviant religious movements, especially those whose demands impose great costs upon their members. Despite the chasm separating the Krishna-chanting followers Swami Prabhupada from the suicide-bombing followers of Osama Bin Ladin, studies of the former have relevance for the latter.

From the late-1960s through the mid-1980s, sociologists devoted immense energy to the study of New Religious Movements.⁴ They did so in part because NRM growth directly contradicted their traditional theories of secularization, not to mention the sensational mid-sixties claims God was “dead” (Cox 1966; Murchland 1967). NRM’s also were ideal subjects for case studies, on account of their small size, brief histories, distinctive practices, charismatic leaders, devoted members, and rapid evolution. But above all, the NRM’s attracted attention because they *scared* people.

We have trouble recalling the fear provoked by groups like the Krishnas, Moonies, and Rajneeshes. Their years of explosive growth are long past, and many of their “strange” ideas have become staples of popular culture.⁵ But they looked far more threatening in the seventies and eighties, especially after November 18, 1978. On that day, the Reverend Jim Jones, founder of the People’s Temple, ordered the murder of a U.S. Congressman followed by the mass murder/suicide of 913 members of his cult, including nearly 300 children.

The “cults” aggressively proselytized and solicited on sidewalks, airports, and shopping centers all over America. They recruited young adults to the dismay of their parents. Their leaders promoted bizarre beliefs, dress, and diet. Their members often lived communally, devoted their time and money to the group, and adopted highly deviant lifestyles. Cults were accused of gaining converts via deception and coercion; funding themselves through illegal activities; preying upon people the young, alienated, or mentally unstable; luring members into strange sexual liaisons; and using force, drugs, or threats to deter the exit of disillusioned members. The accusations were elaborated in books, magazine articles, newspaper accounts, and TV drama. By the late-1970s, public concern and media hype had given birth to anti-cult organizations, anti-cult legislation, and anti-cult judicial rulings. The public, the media, many psychologists, and the courts largely accepted the claim that cults could “brainwash” their members, thereby rendering them incapable of rational choice, including the choice to leave.⁶

We now know that nearly all the anti-cult claims were overblown, mistaken, or outright lies. Americans no longer obsess about Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, or the Children of God. But a large body of research remains. *It witnesses to the ease with which the public, media, policy-makers, and even academics accept irrationality as an explanation for behavior that is new, strange, and (apparently or actually) dangerous.* Consider, for example, the key questions and standard answers that arose concerning

cults. One is struck by how many of these 30-year-old questions and answers mirror contemporary conversations about suicide-bombing.

Just as we now wonder who in his right mind joins Al Qaeda or Islamic Jihad, so our predecessors wondered what sort of (crazy) person was drawn to International Society of Krishna Consciousness or the Bhagwan movement of Shree Rajneesh. Then as now, the most popular explanations have emphasized:

- Grievance, real or imagined – hostility at home, frustration at work, failed relationships, religious disappointments.
- Economic deprivation – especially poverty, unemployment, limited work skills, or other forms of economic deprivation.
- Social deprivation – including alienation from family and friends, poor social skills, inability to form normal relationships, or lack of career goals.
- Cognitive limitations – lack of intelligence, knowledge, or education.
- Psychopathology – including intolerance of ambiguity, need for authority, paranoia, neurotic fears, or outright mental illness.

To outsiders most extremists groups look even stranger than their recruits. Though novelty might attract many “searchers,” what explains why so many stayed? By what process did cults turn curious visitors into fanatical devotees? And why is defection so rare? Why do cult members remain fiercely loyal and firmly attached despite the sacrifices they make and abuses they endure? The standard answers emphasize:

- Social pressure, deception, mind control – the cult employs numerous social and psychological techniques that warp a members’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions.
- Cognitive dissonance – having adopted a deviant, salient, and costly lifestyle, members are loath to admit error, even to themselves.
- Dependence – having walked away from the world (including one’s money, career, friends, family) the member has no place to turn.
- Antipathy – indoctrination teaches members to they hate the secular world, distrust their former friends, and fear their families.
- Delusion – members refuse to face facts and keep hoping that the cult leaders claims will somehow prove true.
- Drugs, sex, philosophy – drugs, sex, Asian philosophy, communal living, and other exotic or illegal elements of 1960s counter-culture appealed to many young people (and, according critics, were also used as tools of control).
- Status and rewards – cult leaders dangle the prospect of increasing status, authority, luxury, and heavenly rewards.
- Coercion, threat, force – the members are not permitted to leave, nor can they communicate with outsiders, and they (correctly) fear retribution if they do attempt escape.

As the case studies piled up, it became apparent that both the media stereotypes (of sleep-deprived, sugar-hyped, brainwashed automatons) and academic theories (of alienated, authoritarian, neurotics) were far off mark. Most cult converts were children of privilege raised by educated parents in suburban homes. Young, healthy, intelligent, and college educated, they could look forward to solid careers and comfortable incomes.⁷

Psychologists searched in vain for a prevalence of “authoritarian personalities,” neurotic fears, repressed anger, high anxiety, religious obsession, personality disorders, deviant needs, and other mental pathologies. They likewise failed to find alienation, strained relationships, and poor social skills. In nearly all respects – economically, socially, psychologically – the typical cult converts tested out normal. Moreover, nearly all those who left cults after weeks, months, or even years of membership showed no sign of physical, mental, or social harm. Normal background and circumstances, normal personalities and relationships, and a normal subsequent life – this was the “profile” of the typical cultist.

And yet cult life itself was anything but normal. The more deviant groups did demand complete commitment; members did renounce everyday jobs and did turn over all they earned; and some groups did adopt strange sexual practices, ranging from strict celibacy to institutionalized promiscuity. Many cults did encourage their members to withdraw from secular society and severely limit communication with family and friends. Daily activities did revolve around prayers, chants, meditation, sermons, study, proselytizing, and fund-raising. In short, the members *did* sacrifice the relationships, rewards, and activities of normal life. Cult membership was very costly.⁸

Costly but *not* crazy. In case after case, conversion and commitment turned out to be products of rational choice and social attachments, rather than deception, coercion, bribery, or “brainwashing.” This well-established fact deserves elaboration, for it is by no means obvious, and it extends directly to suicide bombing.

The “Brainwashing” Myth:⁹

It took a mountain of empirical evidence to establish that cult conversion and retention were largely matters of choice, and “rational” choice at that. Indeed, it seemed clear to both scholars and the public that rational choice was the *least* likely explanation for something as bizarre and costly as cult membership. Hence, if converts lacked histories of ignorance, deprivation, grievance, alienation, or mental abnormality, then they *must* be victims of extensive indoctrination, extreme social pressure, and systematic psychological persuasion that overwhelmed their capacity for rational choice. The most popular variant of this view came to be known as the “brainwashing” or “coercive persuasion” theory of conversion.

The term “brainwashing” was introduced in the 1950s to describe the indoctrination methods that Chinese and Korean communists used to elicit false confessions and political repudiations from prisoners of war. These victims were indeed coerced – held in confinement, deprived of food, water, and sleep, often tortured, threatened with death, and thereby forced to act, speak, and perhaps even think in ways that bore little relationship to their original beliefs and commitments. In the 1970s, however, Margaret Singer (1979), Richard Ofshe (1992), and several other scholars (see Robbins 1988) re-introduced “brainwashing” to describe the recruitment practices of the Moonies and other so-called cults. For reasons that had much to do with politics but little to do with practices, brainwashing was viewed as the special province of cults. Priests, nuns, and other devotees of “legitimate” (which is to say, widespread) religions were almost never accused of having

become brainwashed automatons, no matter how much formal training, family encouragement, or hellfire and brimstone preaching preceded their vows. A spate of lurid books, articles, and media reports painted the Moonies as masters of mind control who duped, and sometimes even kidnapped, unsuspecting youth to attend indoctrination seminars at isolated locations where, locked up, sleep-deprived, and “buzzed” on high-sugar diets, they were subjected to mind-numbing lectures, repetitive chanting, “love bombing,” and other insidious practices that deprive them of judgment, individuality, or personal will and turned them into “robots, glassy eyed and mindless, programmed” to serve the organization and person of Reverend Moon (Barker 1984).

The truth, however, bore no relation to the sensational stories. Numerous studies of cult recruitment, conversion, and retention found no evidence of “brainwashing.” The Moonies and other new religious movements did indeed devote tremendous energy to outreach and persuasion, but they employed conventional methods and enjoyed very limited success. In the most comprehensive study to date, Eileen Barker (1984) could find no evidence that Moonie recruits were ever kidnapped, confined, or coerced (though it *was* true that some anti-cult “deprogrammers” kidnapped and restrained converts so as to “rescue” them from the movement). Seminar participants were not deprived of sleep; the food was “no worse than that in most college residences;” the lectures were “no more trance-inducing than those given everyday” at many colleges; and there was very little chanting, no drugs or alcohol, and little that could be termed “frenzy” or “ecstatic” experience (Barker 1984). People were free to leave, and leave they did – in droves.

Barker’s comprehensive enumeration showed that among the relatively modest number of recruits who went so far as to attend two-day retreats (claimed to be Moonie’s most effective means of “brainwashing”), fewer than 25% joined the group for more than a week, and only 5% remained full-time members one year later. Among the larger numbers who visited a Moonie centre, not one in two-hundred remained in the movement two years later. With failure rates exceeding 99.5%, it comes as no surprise that full-time Moonie membership in the U.S. never exceeded few thousand. And this was one of the most successful cults of the era! Once researchers began checking, rather than simply repeating the numbers claimed by the groups, defectors, or journalists, they discovered dismal retention rates in nearly all groups.¹⁰ By the mid-1980s, researchers had so thoroughly discredited “brainwashing” theories that both the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the American Sociological Association agreed to add their names to an amicus brief denouncing the theory in court (Richardson 1985).

Networks of Faith:

Fortunately for the cults, and the researchers, outreach did not *always* fail. Some conversions did occur, and these followed consistent patterns. In place of the sensational stories and traditional theories, the case studies identified *social networks* and *social capital* as key to effective recruitment and retention. Later I shall argue that the same social processes operate in militant religious groups, including those that employ suicide-attacks.

Through the work of Gary Becker (1975), James Coleman (1988), Robert Putnam (1995), and others, scholars have become well-acquainted with the social foundations of human commitments, relationships, and institutions. Most insights from the study of cults are properly viewed as special examples of general principles concerning social networks and social, religious, or “spiritual” capital. It would be a mistake, however, to drain the insights of their concrete character. For example, economists must guard against the tendency to conflate very close family or friendship ties with the social networks that routinely accompany employment in a particular firm, dwelling in a particular community, or attendance at a particular school.

The seminal work on cults, conversion, and social networks came from yet another study of the Moonies. By sheer luck, John Lofland and Rodney Stark (Lofland and Stark 1965) choose to study the group back in the mid-1960s, when it was still microscopically small – a dozen young adults who had just moved to San Francisco from Eugene, Oregon. The group was led at the time by Young Oon Kim, a former professor of religion in Korea who had come to Oregon in 1959 to launch the Unification Church’s first American mission.¹¹

Lofland and Stark discovered that all the current members were united by close ties of friendship predating their contact with Miss Kim. The first three converts had been young housewives and next door neighbors who befriended Miss Kim after she rented a room from one of them. Subsequently, several of the husbands joined, followed by several of their friends from work. When Lofland and Stark began their study, the group had yet to convert a single stranger.

This recruitment pattern was not what the Miss Kim had sought or expected. During her first year in America she had tried to win converts through lectures and press releases. Later, in San Francisco the group also tried radio spots and public meetings in rented halls. But these methods yielded nothing. All the new recruits during Lofland and Stark’s period of observation were old friends or relatives of prior converts, or people who formed close friendships with one or more group member.

Proselytizing bore fruit only when it followed or coincided with the formation of strong social attachments, typically family ties or close personal friendships. Successful conversion was not so much about selling beliefs as it was about building ties, thereby lowering the social costs and raising the social benefits associated with changing one’s religious orientation. The converse was also true. *Recruitment failure was all but assured if a person maintained strong attachments to a network of non-members.* Many people spent time with the Moonies and expressed considerable interest in their doctrines but never joined. In nearly every case, these people had strong on-going attachments to non-members who disapproved of the group. By contrast, those who joined were often newcomers to San Francisco and thus separated from their family and friends.

In short, *social attachments lie at the heart of conversion, and conversion tends to proceed along social networks.* This discovery has been replicated in scores of subsequent studies all over the world. The studies include such diverse groups as Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, Nichiren Shosha Buddhism, a UFO group, the “Church of the Sun,” the

fundamentalist “Crusade House,” the “Christ Communal Organization,” Mormons, a Mormon schismatic sect, Catholic Charismatics, Christian Scientists, and Bahai converts (Robbins 1988). And this list is far from complete (Kox, Meeus and Hart, 1991).

Stated somewhat more abstractly, the fundamental sociological “law” of conversion asserts that *conversion to religious groups almost never occurs unless the recruit develops stronger attachments to members of the group than to non-members.*

The law explains why *the establishment of a new religion, cult, or sect almost always begins with the conversion of the founder’s own family members and close friends.* Mohammed’s first convert was his wife Khadijah, the second was his cousin Ali, followed by his servant Zayd and then his old friend Abu-Bakr (Watt, 1961). Joseph Smith founded the Mormon Church on April 6, 1830 after enlisting his brothers Hyrum and Samuel, Oliver Cowdery who boarded with Smith’s parents, and two of Cowdery’s friends.¹² As Stark has emphasized in a recent paper, similar patterns apply to Abraham, Moses, and even Jesus (see Stark 2001).

The law of social conversion likewise predicts that *as long as people remain deeply attached to the social networks of one faith, they rarely ever switch to another faith.* Thus, the Mormon missionaries who called upon the Moonies were immune to the appeals of Miss Kim and her followers, despite forming warm relationships with several members. The typical convert was religiously unattached, and most were not actively searching for answers to religious questions. The Moonies quickly learned that they were wasting their time at church socials or denominational student centers. They did far better in places where they came in contact with the unattached and uncommitted. This finding too has been replicated in subsequent research (see Stark and Bainbridge 1985). Hence, *new religious movements draw most of their converts from among those who are religiously inactive or only loosely attached to their current religion.*

Absent direct observation, all these points are easy to miss, because people’s retrospective descriptions of their conversion experiences tend to stress theology.¹³ As long as the group views belief as central to its mission, converts will face strong pressure to make doctrine the center of their subsequent testimonies. As Robbins (1988) observes, citing studies by Greil and Rudy (1984), Heirich (1977), and others, “Ideological pressure often leads converts to construct testimonials of the ‘I once was lost but now am found’ variety.” These retrospective accounts are best seen as *products* of the converts’ new identities rather than descriptions of their antecedents. Most new converts have much to learn about the doctrines of their new religions, and many harbor serious doubts about core beliefs at the time they join. More often than not, the decision to join a deviant group and “play the role of convert” comes well before any fundamental change in personal beliefs, identity, and world-view (Robbins 1988). Social attachments are the horse that pulls the cart of ideological change.¹⁴

Yet another consequence of the social conversion process is the fact that *conversion is rarely sudden.* Instead, people who have encountered a new religion through their friends or family go through a gradual process of learning and listening and questioning before finally embracing the new faith. Typically, they take a quite active role in this process. Indeed,

Lofland (1977) criticized his own “Lofland-Stark” theory for its passive view of converts. Further field work convinced him that people play a major role in converting themselves. Lofland’s observations were subsequently verified by other field researchers including Bainbridge (1978), Barker (1984), and Richardson (1985). Conversion involves introspection as well as interaction. People question, weigh, and evaluate their situations and options. Nor does the introspective process end with early professions of faith. Members of religious groups continue to assess their commitment, and many recant.

Conversion Revisited:

Having described how case studies demolished popular myths about cult conversion, let me summarize these and other cult-literature findings that seem relevant to suicide bombing. I conjecture that *nearly all of the following behavioral regularities carry over from deviant cults to militant religious groups that perpetrate acts of terror.*

1) The typical cult (and suicide-bombing?) recruit is normal in nearly all respects – economically, socially, psychologically.

- Typical cult converts are *not* plagued by neurotic fears, repressed anger, high anxiety, religious obsession, personality disorders, deviant needs, and other mental pathologies.
- Typical converts are *not* alienated, frustrated in their relationships, or lacking in social skills.
- Typical converts are young, healthy, intelligent, with better than average backgrounds and prospects.

2) Conversion to deviant religious groups (and suicide-bombing groups?) rarely occurs unless the recruit develops stronger attachments to members of the group than to non-members.

- People with relatively few or relatively weak social ties are more likely to join.¹⁵
- People with strong ties are very unlikely to convert – included those who are married with children, home-owners, people well-established in their jobs, occupations, and neighborhood.
- Groups tend to grow through pre-existing social networks.
- Social barriers (whether economic, regional, ethnic, language, or religious) tend to block paths of recruitment.
- New religious movements draw most of their converts from among those with low levels of religious activity and commitment.

3) Recruitment is a *process* involving repeated social interactions, and recruits participate extensively and intentionally in their own conversions.

- Conversion is almost always incremental.
- The form and timing of institutionalized rites of passage (such as baptisms or public testimonies) rarely corresponds to the actual form or timing of conversion.
- The conversion process often involves reinterpreting one’s own life story so as to emphasize past levels of discontentment, sinfulness, or spiritual longing.
- Analogous reconstructions often follow defection from movements.¹⁶

- Belief typically *follows* involvement. Strong attachments draw people into religious groups, but strong beliefs develop more slowly or never develop at all.
- High rates of involvement and sacrifice can coexist with doubt, uncertainty, and high probability of defection.
- Intensity of commitment is *not* synonymous with certainty of belief or stability of attachment.
- Those who leave cults after weeks, months, or even years of membership have little difficulty returning to normal activities, beliefs, and relationships.

Neither the established literature on cults nor the newer literature on terrorism suffice to prove the conjecture that all these characteristics apply to militant religious groups. But much of the available evidence supports the conjecture, and more evidence is appearing all the time. Some of the more striking results concern the personal characteristics of suicide bombers, the role of groups, and the importance of social networks.

The substantial body of empirical results reviewed or derived by Krueger and Maleckova (2003) thus finds “little direct connection between poverty or [poor] education and participation in terrorism.” Moreover, Berrebi (2003) finds that Palestinian suicide bombers have substantially *more* schooling and *better* economic backgrounds than the average Palestinian. Berrebi’s statistical portrait reaffirms the portrait that emerges from Nassra Hassan’s (2001) interviews with potential Palestinian suicide-bombers, which in turn sounds exactly like a quote from the literature on cult converts: “None of [the bombers] were uneducated, desperately poor, simple minded or depressed. Many were middle class and, unless they were fugitives, held paying jobs. ... Two were the son’s of millionaires.”

Studies have likewise established the critical role of intense *groups* in recruiting, training, and directing suicide bombers. David Brooks (Brooks) aptly describes Palestinian suicide bombing of the past several years as “a highly communitarian enterprise ... initiated by tightly run organizations that recruit, indoctrinate, train, and reward the bombers.” Although the organizations seek to motivate potential bombers in many ways, the “crucial factor” is “loyalty to the group,” promoted by “small cells” and “countless hours of intense and intimate spiritual training.” As Kramer (1991) has emphasized, the “social dimension” was no less crucial in the Lebanese suicide attacks of the mid-1980s. Although these “self-martyrs” sacrificed themselves, they were also sacrificed by others ... [who] selected, prepared, and guided” them. For more on the activities of the bomber’s “sponsors,” see also Hoffman (2003).

We are also beginning to discover that, as with cults recruits of the 1970s, bombers and other militant extremists are typically recruited through existing social networks. See, for example, Barrett’s (2003) recent description of the process by which an Indian-born Muslim attending college in America converted to radical Islam and was later recruited into the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷ We likewise know that many of Al Qaeda’s top leaders are closely linked through kinship and marriage, but the on the whole the literature seems to have given social networks less attention than they deserve.

These are by no means the only examples of recent findings recapitulating those of literature on cults. Indeed, many others can be gleaned from the essays of this volume or from review essays, such as Cronin (2003). I expect to see the parallels continue piling up as we learn more about today's jihadists. More importantly, I would urge contemporary researchers to mine the established literature on cults for its many insights, predictions, and theories.

Lessons from Economics

From the sociology of religion we obtain numerous facts about the members, activities, and organizational structure of deviant religious groups. From economics, by contrast, we obtain a body of theory that integrates these facts within a broad framework that I call the "market for martyrs." The market is typically economic insofar as it emerges from rational choice, including choices concerning production, consumption, exchange, cooperation, and competition. Nevertheless, the market is unlike a standard commercial market for good and services, nor does it have much in common with the non-standard market models that economists have previously developed to explain crime, war, civil conflict, hatred, or suicide. The distinctive features reflect my decision to model extremist groups as religious "clubs."

The Supply Side:¹⁸

Let us view militant religious groups as religious firm that "produce" acts of violence (directed at third-party victims) in exchange for benefits both material and social. The group's leaders act as managers and employers insofar as they recruit, train, and supervise the supply of (sometimes suicidal) labor that constitutes a key input in the firm's violent "outputs." Outside "customers," "investors," or "owners" who value these outputs may be the primary source of funds required to operate the business. (The analogy to a standard commercial firm is obviously not perfect, but to minimize typographical clutter I will avoid the quotation marks henceforth.)

Finding people willing to work, and especially die, in this line of business would seem to be management's greatest challenge. Given the pathological character of suicide (and murder), it comes as no surprise that nearly everyone – the press, the public, policy-makers, and most scholars – views labor supply as the central problem and puzzle of suicide bombing. I contend, however, that this seriously misinterprets the situation, focuses on the wrong side of the market, and suggests the wrong strategies for deterrence.

Supply of killers: Sadly, the basic supply of labor is readily available. Many people can be induced to steal, riot, vandalize, kill, or commit other acts of violence, protest, and civil disobedience. Indeed, societies devote substantial effort to limit the *voluntary* supply of such activities. Increased risk of capture, injury, or death certainly tends to reduce supply, but keep in mind that the number called upon to die is very small relative to the total number working for the firm. Ex ante, the typical worker may face risks no greater than those endured by most criminals or war-time soldiers.

Supply of self-sacrifice: Rational people do not *readily* sacrifice their health, status, income, comfort, freedom, much less their life. But most people *do* endure substantial costs for reasons other than personal benefit. Apparently rational individuals routinely risk wealth, health, and even life for family and friends, and sometimes even strangers. Nearly everyone *claims* willingness to suffer and even die for their most cherished values, and a non-trivial number make good on their claims. As Stark (1996) has shown, the Early Christian martyrs faced death in a manner that is (probably) best interpreted as voluntary, deliberate, non-violent, and rational.¹⁹

Standard strategies: Groups and societies routinely induce people to kill *and* die for causes far removed from their personal well-being or “genetic fitness.” Military training is the prime example. The most effective soldiers are not those with nothing to live for, but rather those with something they are willing to die for. (The best recruits are also young, single, healthy, capable, and intelligent males.) Effective military units make very limited use of money and material reward (to self or survivors) as motivators. Status and honor are more important, as is demonizing the enemy and maintaining a shared sense of moral conviction about the enterprise. Above all, it is critical that (in addition to the requisite skills and knowledge) the soldiers of a unit build strong mutual bonds of trust and affection.

Rational sacrifice: The evidence thus suggests for rational actors who sacrifice their lives, the relevant “objective function” has the form, expected benefits minus costs,

$$E[B(R, Z) - C(R,Z)]$$

where the actor’s utility depends on the benefits obtained from his standard social and economic activities, Z, together with the benefits obtained from his suicide-related activities, R. Moreover, the major R-benefits include: fame, honor, and recognition; moral status; value of accomplishment (as judged by self and valued-others); beneficial consequences and rewards for significant others; beneficial consequences and rewards for self, magnitude of harm and humiliation, imposed on enemies. In general, the stream of expected benefits will start well before the sacrificial acts (as when the volunteer is honored by his comrades or rewarded by his leaders) and extend well beyond (and, perhaps, into a life after death). “Socially constructed” benefits weigh heavily in the actors’ calculation, as do the subjective probabilities attached to nearly all the anticipated outcomes. The rational actor will weigh the net benefits against the relevant costs, including: anticipated pain and suffering, costs to loved ones, risk of failure, humiliation, capture, execution, reprisals, and so forth.

Supply-side deterrence: The preceding observations help us better appreciate the difficulties of supply-side deterrence. Supply-side strategies fall prey to fundamental problems:

1) Terrorist firms can function effectively even if the supply of suicide-killers is *extremely* small. Even a few successful suicide bombings can cause widespread terror.

2) Standard criminal penalties (such as fines, imprisonment, and execution) have minimal impact on the expected costs and benefits confronting as a rational suicide bomber.

3) The diversity of perceived benefits associated with self-sacrifice sustains many different sources of supply and many different methods of recruitment. If opponents block one source or method, firms can readily substitute to others.²⁰

As Israel has learned at great cost, terrorists substitute at every conceivable margin. Seek out those who fit certain profiles, and the supply shifts toward different ages, gender, appearance, and so forth. Destroy the homes of the killers' families, and supporters increase material assistance. Go so far as to kill the family members – a level of reprisal beyond anything known in Israel – and the firms will recruit more heavily among those whose relatives are distant or dead. All early suicide bombers were “young, male, and single,” but as Hoffman (2003) notes, quoting a senior Israeli Defense Force officer, “There is no clear profile anymore – not for terrorists and especially not for suicide bombers.” Some recent bombers have been middle-aged, some married, some female, and some have had children. In place obviously Arabic young males carrying duffle bags or backpacks, recent bombers have worn Israeli military fatigues, adopted the distinctive dress and hairstyles of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, or disguised themselves as expectant mothers.

The problem of substitution is compounded by the endogenous and social character of critical supply-side benefits. Actions that make successful suicide attacks more costly or difficult tend also to increase the fame, honor, and admiration accorded to those who succeed. Hence:

4) Reducing the rate of suicide bomber success may not yield comparable reductions in the net expected benefits associated with suicide missions and may actually increase the net benefits.²¹

The Demand Side:

Careful consideration of both supply and demand is a hallmark of economic analysis. In the case of suicide bombing, however, demand has received vastly less attention than supply, and market structure has received almost no attention at all. Claims about the methods, motives, and mental state of the killers have dominated discourse in much the way that methods, motives, and mental states dominated discourse about cult converts in the 1970s. In the case of cults, presumptions about the irrationality of recruits led to correspondingly distorted views of the organizations they joined. Leaders were seen as: (a) irrational – paranoid, delusional, or just plain “crazy”, (b) power-hungry – lusting for authority, admiration, and fame, (c) avaricious – craving luxury, wealth, or sex; or (e) angry, jealous, fearful, hate-filled, or frustrated – seeking vengeance or victory over competitors, enemies, and the prevailing social order.

Similar fallacies warp our thinking about the groups and especially the group leaders who recruit, train, and direct suicide bombers. After realizing that the bombers had little in common with Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh or the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski – fanatical loners led by their own twisted motives – writers began to emphasize the fanaticism of terrorist groups and the twisted motives of their leaders. The religion studies, however, reveal leaders as *social entrepreneurs*, whose creativity, salesmanship, and management shape a subculture that evolves as leaders, followers, and outsiders interact (see Stark 1991; Stark and Bainbridge 1979). Economic models are ideally suited to extend this insight.

The modern (“new institutional”) theory of the firm provides a good starting point. Although textbooks traditionally model firms in terms of simple production functions, actual production is immensely complicated. Even simple outputs require numerous initial inputs, numerous intermediate steps, and immense coordination. To limit the scope and complexity of their own activities, firms obtain intermediate products from other firms or the general market for goods and services, confining themselves to the relatively few things that cost less to do internally (see Williamson 1975).

Complex structures: In contrast to legitimate businesses, terrorist firms face the threat of capture, imprisonment, or execution. This does much more than merely raise costs; it forces the firm to adopt internal structures that are larger, more complex, and more vertically integrated than would otherwise be efficient. The terrorist firm incurs high “transaction costs” when working with other firms or the general market. To avoid detection, the firm must conduct its market transactions through complex, covert, and costly channels. This is, of course, especially true when seeking specialized inputs such as explosive devices or military hardware. Subcontracting is similarly costly insofar as it raises the risk of detection through covert surveillance, intercepted communications, betrayal, or capture of the subcontractor. Vertical integration minimizes these external costs, but does so at the cost of larger and more costly internal forms of organization, including division of the firm into many different sub-units. The proliferation of sub-units is especially pronounced for terrorist and revolutionary organizations, which face such grave risks from defection or discovery, that they typically divide themselves into numerous small cells (which also help to reduce free-riding).

Team production: Costs and complexity are further increased by the need to obtain workers able to kill and willing to die. One cannot hire such people as one does office clerks, or even contract killers. They must be “produced” through a *social* process that involves recruitment, interaction, and training. Tremendous effort is required to build commitment, maintain obedience, and prevent defection. With greater sacrifice comes more selective recruiting, more intense training, and more extensive group activity. Not just any group structure will suffice. Successful groups have strong rules, strong social boundaries, strong sanctions for disobedience, and strong leadership hierarchies. Successful groups tend also to be religious – a fact we will consider further below.

Competitors, defectors, free-riders: Free-riding is the bane of collective action, and the problem is especially severe for terrorist organizations, where failure often leads to

imprisonment or execution. The firm confronts numerous difficult trade-offs. Larger groups encourage free-riding and are easier to identify or infiltrate, but smaller groups require more outside support and may be less able to identify, recruit, and train effective “martyrs,” who thus fail or defect more often. Other internal threats include take-over bids and schism, neither of which can be blocked through the legal maneuvers open to legitimate organizations. A profitable “market” also attracts competing firms, who in this case have little incentive to play fair. They may seek to block the firm’s recruitment, take credit for its successes, solicit spies, bribe defectors, tip off authorities, or murder personnel.

The high cost of incompetent, unreliable, or untrustworthy workers leads us to predict that suicide bombers will tend to be relatively well educated, mentally stable, and socially well-adjusted – a profile that recent studies tend to confirm. Even if it were relatively easy to enlist volunteers from among the poor, ignorant, desperate, enraged, or alienated fringe of society, working with such people would prove far too risky. No rational person trusts his fate to a co-worker with a death-wish.

Who pays? Even if all other problems can be solved, the terrorist firm may have no effective way to “sell” its product. Although no one cares to call suicide attacks a “public good,” the consequences are public in the sense of being non-excludable and non-rival. Hence even if many people attach great value to the attacks, each individual person will have no incentive to pay for the product either before or after the fact. Standard economics solutions are largely out of the question, because they require collective action that virtually guarantees detection by authorities.

The Role of Religion:

The impediments to success in the suicide-bombing business are so great that one wonders how such businesses ever form, much less thrive. It is no coincidence that religion plays a major role in nearly all such groups.²² A shared and salient religion provides resources for overcoming many of the problems reviewed above.²³ No *single* characteristic of religion is key, and that itself helps account for its impact.

Consider, for example, the *supernatural* content of many religious “technologies” – the defining feature of religion according to many contemporary scholars (including Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Stark and Finke 2000). One may seriously question a cleric’s claims that action “A” will lead to afterlife reward “R,” but this much is sure: no strictly secular system can offer any hope of “R” at all.²⁴ In the market for martyrs, a faith-based firm that (credibly) offers immense *personal* rewards in exchange for death enjoys an obvious *ceteris paribus* advantage over its non-religious competitors.

The potential motivating power of afterlife rewards (including, perhaps, 72 virgins) has not been lost on journalists, scholars, and even economists.²⁵ I would suggest, however, that we shift the emphasis from the recruit to the recruiters. Belief in heaven and hell is so pervasive that it tells us almost nothing about the identity of martyrs.²⁶ But very few

organizations are adept at reinforcing those beliefs and shaping their content. It follows that the would-be suppliers of suicide attacks have strong incentives to ally their firms with religious organizations, and especially those types that foster exceptionally strong belief, commitment, and solidarity.

The advantages of a sectarian-religious orientation extend far beyond the recruitment of martyrs. Sectarian groups are uniquely adept at avoiding free-rider problems and hence, uniquely well-suited for producing collective goods. The distinctive demands of a sectarian group, which impose large and apparently gratuitous costs on its members, reduce free-riding both by screening out the uncommitted and by raising participation rates among those who remain. As Iannaccone (1992) and others have shown, the collective benefits of this odd but effective strategy account not only for the success of high-cost religious groups but also for their many distinctive characteristics. These include: distinctive lifestyles; high levels of commitment and high rates of group involvement; strong social bonds within the group and barriers to socialization outside the group; clear distinctions between members and non-members; claims to an exclusive truth; strict penalties for violating group norms; wide-ranging activities that provide substitutes for goods, services, and social benefits that non-members obtain via market exchange or multiple groups; and disproportionate, but by no means exclusive, appeal to people with relatively limited secular opportunities.²⁷

For terrorist groups, the advantages of a sectarian orientation are huge. These are groups in which “free-riding” has the potential to land the entire organization in prison or worse. So also, these are groups whose survival is threatened by every transaction with outsiders. Nearly every standard sectarian characteristic benefits a terrorist group, an observation most certainly false for commercial firms or legal associations. Berman’s (2003) penetrating analysis of Hamas, Taliban, and radical Jewish groups shows how the sectarian strategy for collective commitment enhances the efficacy of radical militia’s, both in theory and in practice.

Religion confers still other benefits. If a terrorist group can locate itself *within* a larger sectarian group, it immediately gains access to a tight social network of loyal sect members who are (a) unlikely to betray fellow sect members, (b) accustomed to the demands of sect life, (c) committed to (or at least immersed in) a shared set of supernatural beliefs, and thus (d) ideal candidates for recruitment.²⁸ The sect also provides a natural (and non-free-riding) source of funding and payment for services rendered. These facts help us understand the success of groups like Hamas, whose terrorist cells make up a small portion of a much larger (but supportive) organization that operates like a legitimate sectarian religious organization that harnesses collective action so as to produce religious instruction, secular education, health care, political action, and other services.

A terrorist group likewise benefits from locating itself within a broad religious *tradition* that differs from that of its enemies. Support and sympathy (or at least absence of animosity) are more likely to span its entire subculture; sympathy for the injuries inflicted on the (heathen/infidel) enemy are more likely to be limited; and the enemy will have a

much harder time penetrating the group's organization and network because doing so means *also* penetrating a different subculture. Members of the tradition or sects within the tradition also provide access to entirely legitimate institutions (such as churches or mosques) and globe-spanning networks that facilitate the transmission and coordination of information, individuals, materials, and funds.

Having listed so many ways in which religion aids the suicide-bombing firm, I must acknowledge the potential dangers of "kitchen sink" explanation. I recall a class in which George Stigler once quipped that "there can never be more than one reason for anything." Whether or not Stigler's claim is true, long lists of reasons are an affront to Occam's razor and a theorist's nightmare. In this case, however, two considerations mitigate the sin of multiplicity. First, this paper is designed to focus attention on the many testable research questions that scholars should be asking, but for the most part have not. Second, an essential characteristic of supernaturalism, and hence of religion, is that it constitutes a uniquely general technology – there is literally *nothing* that falls beyond the theoretical limits of supernatural production and exchange.²⁹ Consider the consequences.

Both in principle and in fact, people call upon religion for everything – health, wealth, salvation, power, long life, immortality, eternal bliss, military victory, and, yes, even good sex. Major religious traditions thus evolve into immense systems of beliefs, behavior, and institutions with many likes to every conceivable human activity and concern. Strong religious organizations (as opposed to tame and specialized variants characteristic of liberal-mainstream congregations) almost never specialize in just a few niche products or a few niche needs. This diversity of output is yet one more feature that serves the needs of terrorists, and it mirrors the advantages of product "bundling." In standard economic bundling, very different customers can be persuaded to pay the same relatively high price for a bundled collection of products – such as a newspaper, year-long theatre subscription, or three-day pass to all the attractions in Disneyland. In similar manner, many different recruits can be persuaded to join and remain loyal to a religious group (including religious-terrorist group) that offers members an array of benefits – including intense camaraderie, power, status, honor, identity, purpose, a special "career" devoted to "great" goals, religious activities and rituals, powerful emotional experiences, and the prospect of heavenly rewards. A single-purpose group might prove much more fragile, susceptible to defection whenever a member lost faith in the group's one product, purpose, or principal activity.

A more complete account would, of course, consider the many ways in which religions might undermine the activities of would-be terrorists. It is entirely possible, and I think entirely true, that in most times and places religious commitment, teachings, and institutions tend to block acts of violence at the individual, group, and social level. The starting point for any analysis of religious militancy and terrorism should be its infrequency in all religious traditions, especially when compared to secular ideologies such as nationalism, communism, fascism, and even democracy or the great secular associations we call "governments," "nations," and "ethnicities." My point, however, is not that religion raises or lowers overall rates of terrorism, militancy, warfare,

insurgencies, or violence. Rather, my point is that insofar as religion *can* be utilized it *will* be utilized and *will* prove so highly advantageous in this murderous business that it will tend to dominate the market for martyrs.

Beyond religion:

Throughout this paper I have emphasized religion, and especially its demand-side consequences. I have done so because studies of suicide bombing tend either to ignore religion or to address it in ways that ignore insights from the economics and sociology of religion. My emphasis, however, should not obscure the many non-religious forces operating in the market for martyrs. Though beyond this paper's scope, many are well suited for economic analysis. For example, the goals of (rational) terror-cell leaders are broader than is suggested by standard profit-maximizing models. Leaders operate within a complex market in which successful attacks yield fear and admiration that enhance political and economic power. Suicide bombing also has an "expressive" or "non-instrumental" dimension, analogous to expressive political acts that people value for reasons that go beyond concrete material or political gains. And suicide bombing is just one tool of *asymmetric* warfare – confrontations between parties of vastly different military strength. Its effectiveness depends heavily upon the response it generates among supporters, sympathizers, opponents, potential victims, and third-parties; and its use must be evaluated in relation to the many alternative tools and technologies that could conceivably be substituted for it, ranging from full-scale warfare to peaceful coexistence. For analysis along these lines, see Pape (2003).

Conclusions: Toward a Less Violent Future

Lost in most studies of religious militancy is a crucial fact: religious extremism almost never leads to violence. Thousands of "sects" and "cults" flourish in every region of the world and every religious tradition. Their deviant beliefs and behavior cover every conceivable aspect of life and many demand astonishing levels of commitment and obedience. Yet very few turn to crime, fewer still embrace violence, and virtually none encourage murder or suicide. Inevitably, the exceptions receive tremendous attention in the news, research literature, and popular consciousness; but this is precisely *because* they are so exceptional. To put the numbers in perspective, consider that the United States is home to several *thousand* religious organizations (Melton 1991; Melton 1986) but in the past two generations only two religious leaders have ordered killings: Jim Jones of the People's Temple and David Koresh of the Branch Davidians.³⁰ And only two groups have embraced suicide: the People's Temple and Heaven's Gate. The remaining 99.9% of religious groups (who probably account for 99.99% of actual members) are guilty of doing nothing even remotely similar.³¹ Keeping this fact in mind is exceedingly difficult, when books on fundamentalism routinely carry titles like *Terror in the Mind of God* (Juergensmeyer 2001) or *The Battle for God* (Armstrong 2001).

Here again, our efforts to combat religious militancy must be grounded in a more accurate understanding of extreme and deviant religions. Studies of religious militancy

typically suffer both from sample bias (insofar as they ignore non-militant religious groups) and interpretive bias (insofar as they equate the militant *rhetoric* of many groups with the militant *actions* of just a few). Thus Juergensmeyer structures the chapters of his book so as to emphasize parallel “cultures of violence” among American Christians, Middle-Eastern Muslims, and religious-national groups. But in contrast to the militant Muslim culture of Hamas, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Brotherhood, and Islamic Jihad, the American Christian “culture” consists of the few individuals guilty of abortion clinic bombings and shootings who have received no organizational support and whose actions have been emphatically denounced by virtually all conservative Christian leaders and organizations *including* those strongly opposed to abortion.³²

It is the contrast between violent Islamic militancy and non-violent Christian activism that deserves our attention, not the few strained similarities. And here again, demand-side market factors hold the key. Among the evangelical Christians and orthodox Catholics in America, many millions view the act of abortion as murder, the acceptance of abortion as immoral, and the legality of abortion as grossly unjust. Anti-abortion theology is fully-developed and routinely preached in churches all over America. And tens of thousands of anti-abortion “true believers” already devote substantial portions of their time and money to anti-abortion activities. Thus the *potential* supply of militant anti-abortion “martyrs” is vast. But the *actual* supply remains effectively zero, because no Christian organizations have entered the business of recruiting, training, and launching anti-abortion militants. The absence of effective demand is certainly not rooted in Christianity’s unshakable attachment to non-violence. Rather it reflects contemporary realities – social, legal, economic, and political – that make religiously-sponsored violence *unprofitable* for American religious “firms.” Any church or preacher advocating anti-abortion killings, much less planning them, would suffer huge losses in reputation, influence, membership, and funding, not to mention criminal prosecution and probable imprisonment. Disaster would likewise befall religious firms seeking to profit from virtually any form of criminality or violence in America and, indeed, in much of the world.

The “market conditions” insuring the *non-profitability* of religious militancy exceed the scope of this paper but merit careful study. Nevertheless, *changing market conditions provides the only true solution to the problem of suicide bombing and militant religious radicalism. Other approaches (such as targeting firms, leaders, and recruits) raise operating costs and induce substitution but leave in place the underlying demand, and hence the underlying profit opportunities, associated with this line of business.* This does not mean that the only effective policy goals are tantamount to turning the Middle East into a vast region of prosperity, democracy, capitalism, and liberty. After all, suicide bombing scarcely exists in numerous countries and regions that enjoy none of these blessings. Insights from economics and the sociology of religion help us understand why the “martyrdom” market can flourish only when numerous exceptional conditions combine. Moreover, they suggest that relatively small changes in those conditions may dramatically disrupt the market. The imperative is to understand the market well enough to identify the relatively *small* structural changes and activities most likely to reduce cooperation within terror firms, increase damaging competition between firms, and

undercut the firms' ability to collect payment for services rendered, and above all diminish the underlying *demand* for those homicidal services.³³

WORKING PAPER

NOTES

¹ The 9/11 attacks prompted millions of Americans to ask “why do they hate us?” The disturbing answer seems to be that the individual attackers had *no* personal reasons to hate the American people, leadership, or nation – certainly none approaching those of other individuals from different times, places, regions, races, religions, and ethnicities. Moreover, the populations from which the attackers were drawn have scant reason to hate Americans compared to the reasons that could be claimed by U.S. opponents in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War. (See Peter Ford, “Why do they hate us?” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2001 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0927/p1s1-wogi.html>.)

² The omission has at least three causes. First, very few social scientists study religion, and fewer still have had any experience or training that relates to religious extremism. Second, 19th century theories of secularization have so thoroughly dominated social-scientific views of religion that the inevitability of religious decline remains an article of faith, and contemporary instances of religious commitment are viewed as aberrant, transitory, and epiphenomenal. Third, attacks on American culture and especially American (Christian) religion have become so common in Western intellectual circles that scholars have difficulty responding to Islamists who harness the same rhetoric to advance a non-Christian culture that promotes violence, repression, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, and theocracy. Popular discourse is similarly constrained, and the stereotype of all non-Christian cultures as victims of Western imperialism makes it politically dangerous for American leaders to link *any* act of terrorism to *any* feature of Islam.

³ For seminal work on the economics of crime, see Becker and Landis (1974); for the economics of discrimination, see Becker (1971); for a provocative model of suicide see Hamermesh and Soss (1974); for a recent model of hatred see Glaeser (2002); and for work on terrorism and conflict see (Sandler 19xx).

⁴ For overviews of the literature, see Bromley (1987), Robbins (1988), and Stark (1985).

⁵ We see this influence not only in today’s New Age and Neo-Pagan movements, but also in novels, music, movies, TV shows, video games, university courses, environmentalism, respect for “cultural diversity,” and the intellectual elite’s broad critique of Christian culture.

⁶ Parents hired private investigators to literally kidnap their adult children and subject them to days of highly-coercive “deprogramming.” Courts often agreed that these violations of normal constitutional rights were justified, given the victim’s presumed inability to think and act rationally (Anthony 1990; Anthony and Robbins 1992; Bromley 1983; Richardson 1991; Robbins 1985).

⁷ Rodney Stark (2002) has recently shown that an analogous result holds for Medieval saints – arguably the most dedicated “cult converts” of their day.

⁸ It is true, however, that the costs were decidedly less for the group leaders, who often reveled in worldly luxuries even as they preached heavenly asceticism.

⁹ Portions of this section and the next are based on unpublished work co-authored with Rodney Stark. I appreciate his permission to adapt the material for this essay.

¹⁰ For more on the prevalence and process of cult defection, see Wight (1987) and Bromley (1988).

¹¹ Although the Moonies insist that they are fully within the Christian tradition, many of their teachings are based on new revelations received by Rev. Sun M. Moon. Among these are doctrines concerning the role of Moon as the Lord of the Second Advent, as the new messiah sent to complete the tasks of full human redemption left undone by Jesus.

¹² The eleven witnesses to the Book of Mormon’s authenticity include Joseph Smith’s father and two brothers, Martin Harris (a neighbor), Oliver Cowdery, five Whitmer’s, and Hiram Page (husband of a Whitmer) – prompting Mark Twain to remark, “I could not have been more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified” (Brody 1966: 79).

¹³ When asked why they converted, Moonies invariably noted the irresistible appeal of the *Divine Principles* (the group’s scripture), suggesting that only the blind could reject such obvious and powerful truths. In making these claims, converts implied (and often stated) that their path to conversion was the end product of an intellectual search for faith. But Lofland and Stark knew better because they had met them well before they had learned to appreciate the doctrines, before they had learned how to testify to their faith, back when they were not seeking faith at all and when most of them regarded the religious beliefs of their new set of friends as quite odd.

¹⁴ Research by Hsing-Kuang Chao (1992) helps to clarify how doctrine comes to be seen, retrospectively, as the central factor in conversion. He studied a small Chinese Protestant sect group in Los Angeles whose members are converted from the ranks of Chinese non-Christians. The group publishes a very lengthy church bulletin, and for a number of years a detailed account of each new convert’s journey to faith appeared in it. While these accounts invariably emphasized the role of doctrine, they also offered much secondary information about the social relations by which the person was recruited. Eventually, however, the flow of converts became too large for such lengthy published accounts. To make room, the bulletin editors excised all mention of social relations, leaving only the doctrinal appeals. They did so, not to deceive, but to preserve their space for what they saw as the more important factor.

¹⁵ Hence conversion is more common for those who are young, single, renters, not well established their job, career, neighborhood, or residence, or in transition (socially, professionally, educationally, geographically).

¹⁶ Hence, defectors accounts about the evils, harms, misery, and exploitation characteristic of cult life often prove to be exaggerated or false. For a related phenomenon showing how real reconstructed memories can seem to a different class of “converts,” consider the mid-1980s spate of “recovered” memories of childhood sexual abuse and satanic ritual abuse, nearly all of which turned out to be total fabrications.

¹⁷ The importance of pre-existing social networks and strong personal ties is underscored by the American military’s recent discovery – leading to the capture of Saddam Hussein – that Iraqi resistance was organized around “tribal leadership ... tightly linked through a web of marriages and intensely loyal to Mr. Hussein.” Members of the six main Sunni triangle clans “shielded Saddam for eight months, financed the resistance, and planned assassinations and attacks against Iraqis and coalition forces.” Harold Engstrom, one of the two army intelligence officers who played a major role in uncovering the network, has emphasized that “the extent and depth of how much the tribes were intertwined and integrated was beyond our expectation and frankly shocked us” (Fassihi 2003).

¹⁸ It is easy to identify the demand and supply sides of a standard textbook market, where a uniform generic good is exchanged for a well-defined currency. In contrast, when complex bundles of goods or services are exchanged for other goods or services and especially when many key outputs are jointly produced, each party acts as supplier of some things and demand of others. Identifying the “suppliers” and “supply side” becomes a matter of choice and perspective. By analogy to a firm in the business of producing death, I have viewed the killers as suppliers of labor (and their own lives) and those who recruit them as demanders. When speaking of a less radical group, it may be more natural to think in terms of a religious firm supplying religious services to members who demand religious services and pay with their contributions, commitment, and membership.

¹⁹ Christians imprisoned by the Romans faced a low probability of death. Refusal to recant was far more likely to end in release than execution or torture, albeit after some days or weeks of confinement. Moreover, fellow Christians would visit the prisoners, praising their fortitude and praying for their welfare, continued resistance, and eventual release. The many who survived were lionized heroes, and few who died were honored as saints and martyrs.

²⁰ See Olson’s (1962) penetrating analysis of the failure of strategic “precision bombing” campaigns employed by the American military command in WWII. Attempts to cripple German industrial capacity by targeting ball bearing production plants had far less impact than anticipated, not because bombs failed to destroy their targets but rather because the Germans quickly found ways to use fewer ball-bearings, produce bearings elsewhere,

rebuild the plants, and so forth. Rapid substitution likewise neutralized allied attempts to deprive the German military of copper, tungsten, and many other “critical” resources, both physical and human. *Economic* constraints nullified the search for technologically “indispensable” resources: “The enemy could always afford to replace most of any industry if that industry was small enough. And it matters not how ‘essential’ an industry might be if the enemy can easily replace that industry once it has been destroyed” (Olson 1962).

²¹ For a simple formal example of the process, let the p denote the probability of success and $q = 1 - p$ the probability of failure, let R denote the socially-constructed rewards for with success, which by assumption rise as failures become more likely ($dR/dq > 0$), and let bombers’ derive expected utility $EU = pR$. Then decreasing the success rate, p , will *increase* the bomber’s expected utility as long as reward growth is sufficiently elastic: $(dR/dq)(q/R) > q/p$.

²² Two notable exceptions to this generalization are the Japanese Kamikaze of World War II and the Tamil Tigers. Yet religion, or its functional equivalent, may have played a critical role in these cases as well. The many links between religion and military-nationalism in World War II Japan, raise the distinct possibility that Kamikaze program required a shared *religious* world-view and faith and perhaps even a shared religious/governmental organization. The “secular” character of the Tamil Tigers is likewise open to question. The Tiger’s organization is Marxist/Leninist and hence officially *anti*-religious. But the quasi-religious character of Marxism in general, and small Marxist “sects” in particular, is well known. Moreover, the “secular” Tigers are members Sri Lanka’s Tamil-Hindu minority, fighting for independence from Sri Lanka’s Singhalese-Buddhist majority. The Tamil-Singhalese conflict, which dates back to independence in 1948, pits a Hindu minority against a Buddhist majority that is itself a tiny minority relative to the Hindu-dominated Indian mainland. Michael Radnu (2003), a specialist in terrorist groups, has argued that “the LTTE [Tamil Tigers] and PKK [Kurdish separatists] are in a sense “religious” despite their Marxist/separatist.”

²³ For an important application of this insight to radical militias in general, and Hamas and Taliban in particular, see Berman (2003).

²⁴ For more on this variant of Pascal’s wager and its implications for religion, see Iannaccone (1999).

²⁵ Noteworthy economic examples include Adam Smith’s (1984) discussion of the critical importance of religious constraints on opportunistic behavior, and Azzi and Ehrenberg’s (1975) emphasis of the afterlife motive in their seminal paper on religious participation. For a recent example that directly links suicide-bombing to afterlife motives, see (Wintrobe 2002).

²⁶ In the US, for example, more than 80% of the adult population claims belief in Heaven, and more than 70% claims belief in Hell. Moaddil (2003) reports that in recent surveys in Egypt, Jordan, and Iran, “[a]t least 94% of all respondents said they believed in all of the following: God, life after death, existence of a soul, and heaven and hell.”

²⁷ We must not equate *relatively* limited opportunities with *absolutely* limited opportunities. Incompetence is not likely to make someone more productive in a religious sect than in secular society. Conversely, the *relative* cost of sect membership can be low for some categories of educated and affluent people – including the classic 1970’s cult converts who were young, single, not yet established in a career, and (as it turned out) not inclined to remain cult members very long.

²⁸ For a striking example of these principles at work, see Barrett’s (2003) account of how Mustafa Saied, an India-born college student in America was recruited into the Muslim Brotherhood.

²⁹ For more on this fact and its implications, see Iannaccone (1999)

³⁰ This probably overstates the militancy of Koresh and his Branch Davidians, inasmuch as no history of violence preceded the decision by US the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms to launch a massive raid against the Branch Davidians, surrounding their communal home with more than 75 armed agents who arrived in cars, vans, trucks, and helicopters. For sociological perspectives on the disaster, see Wright (1995).

³¹ The sensational claims made in the 1980s about “Satanic cults” turned out to be false in almost every respect, and no organized group of Satan worshippers was ever found guilty of murder (Richardson 1994 July; Richardson, Best and Bromley 1991).

³² Juergensmeyer’s only other American Christian example is the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building by Timothy McVeigh, who acted alone, was not religiously active, and had no close ties to any religious or political groups.

³³ As an example one such feature, consider the role that modern communications technology play in generating the social-symbolic rewards that motivate the martyr, excite and encourage sympathizers, and horrify and terrorize potential victims. In the absence of photographs, video recordings, TV broadcasts, and satellite news transmissions the bombings would have vastly less impact on all relevant populations.

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