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Personal Freedom or Bondage?

Talk to anyone who is devoutly religious, especially someone who has recently become so, about the effects of religion on his or her life. You will likely get an enthusiastic account of new freedoms obtained: freedom from a sense of worthlessness, from guilt, meaninglessness, and fear. This liberation is well typified by Pilgrim in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) when, as he at last approaches the Celestial City, the great burden that he has been carrying suddenly rolls from his back. He is free at last. A similar refrain is echoed by the deeply religious in every age, even those bound by the chains of slavery, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"

IS RELIGION FREEING OR ENSLAVING?

RELIGION AS FREEING

The freedoms obtained by the religious convert can be impressive, as the following testimonials reveal.

Freedom from fear of death. In a highly publicized interview with *Playboy* magazine (November 1976) during his first presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter revealed a freedom from fear of death.

Playboy: . . . You don't fear death. Why not?

Carter: It's part of my religious belief. I just look at death as not a threat. It's inevitable, and I have an assurance of eternal life. There is no feeling on my part that I *have* to be President, or that I *have* to live, or that I'm immune to danger. It's just that the termination of my physical life is relatively insignificant in my concept of over-all existence. I don't say that in a mysterious way; I recognize the possibility of assassination. But I guess everybody recognizes the possibility of other forms of death—automobile accidents, airplane accidents, cancer. I just don't worry. (p. 84)

During the Persian Gulf Crisis, Saddam Hussein sent a chill through the world with his reminder that the devout Muslim feels much the same; to die fighting the "Great Satan of the West" is not to be feared; it is a high honor.

Freedom from fear in life. The brilliant novelist and poet Emily Brontë (1818–1848) could face not only death but also her hard life on the Yorkshire moors with a freedom from fear.

No coward soul is mine.
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear. (1941)

Freedom from temptation. William James (1902) presents many dramatic examples of the way religion can free one from the vices of the day. To provide just one, hear the testimony of a young man who could not control his drinking. After his religious conversion he was able to say, "From that hour drink has had no terrors for me: I never touch it, never want it" (James, 1902, p. 213). Anyone who has faced alcoholism, either in his or her own life or in the life of a friend or relative, will be impressed by such a dramatic and effective cure. And to those of us who have been unable to stop ourselves from smoking, this same young man was able to add, "The same thing occurred with my pipe, . . . the desire for it went at once and has never returned. So with every known sin, the deliverance in each case being permanent and complete. I have had no temptations since conversion" (p. 213).

Similarly, literally millions of members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) have testified to the power of religion in their efforts to fight the temptation to drink. The first three of AA's Twelve Steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a Decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood Him*. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976, italics in original)

Freedom from concern over possessions. Many testify to a freedom from concern for worldly goods and money. For example, the effect of religious conversion on John Cennick, Methodism's first lay preacher, has been described as follows:

[He] at once left off song-singing, card-playing, and attending theatres. Sometimes he wished to go to a popish monastery, to spend his life in devout retirement. At other times he longed to live in a cave, sleeping on fallen leaves, and feeding on forest fruits. He fasted long and often, and prayed nine times a day. . . . Fancying dry bread too great an indulgence for so great a sinner as himself, he began to feed on potatoes, acorns, crabs, and grass; and often wished that he could live on roots and herbs. (Tyerman, quoted in James, 1902, p. 238)

Freedom from social conventions. George Fox (1624–1691), the founder of Quakerism, was freed from the need to observe many petty social conventions:

When the Lord sent me into the world, he forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to "thee" and "thou" all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small. And as I traveled up and down, I was not to bid people Good-morning, or Good-evening, neither might I bow or scrape with my leg to anyone. . . . Oh! the blows, punchings, beatings, and imprisonments that we underwent for not putting off our hats to men! Some had their hats violently plucked off and thrown away, so that they quite lost them. . . . And though it was but a small thing in the eye of man, yet a wonderful confusion it brought among all professors and priests; but, blessed be the Lord, many came to see the vanity of that custom of putting off hats to men, and felt the weight of Truth's testimony against it. (Fox, 1952)

In recent years members of several religious groups have asserted, at times in court, that their beliefs exempt them from the dictates of social institutions. They claim freedom from reciting any pledge or oath of loyalty, reading certain classics of literature as part of school assignments, serving in the military, even paying taxes.

Freedom from sexual desire. William James (1902) reports Colonel Gardiner's testimony of dramatic liberation from sexual desire:

I was effectually cured of all inclination to that sin I was so strongly addicted to that I thought nothing but shooting me through the head could have cured me of it; and all desire and inclination to it was removed, as entirely as if I had been a sucking child; nor did the temptation return to this day. (p. 214)

Even more impressive is the freedom from sexual desire obtained by Saint Louis of Gonzaga. His biographer recounts that at the age of ten

the inspiration came to him to consecrate to the Mother of God his own virginity—that being to her the most agreeable of possible presents. Without delay, then, and with all the fervor there was in him, joyous of heart, and burning with love, he made his vow of perpetual chastity. Mary accepted the offering of his innocent heart, and obtained for him from God, as a recompense, the extraordinary grace of never feeling during his entire life the slightest touch of temptation against the virtue of purity. . . . He, who by an extraordinary protection of God's grace was never tempted, measured all his steps as if he were threatened on every side by particular dangers. Thenceforward he never raised his eyes, either when walking in the streets, or when in society. Not only did he avoid all business with females even more scrupulously than before, but he renounced all conversation and every kind of social recreation with them. . . . If by chance his mother sent one of her maids of honor to him with a message, he never allowed her to come in, but listened to her through the barely opened door, and dismissed her immediately. He did not like to be alone with his own mother, whether at table or in conversation; and when the rest of the company withdrew, he sought also a pretext for retiring. . . . Several great ladies, relatives of his, he avoided learning to know even by sight; and he made a sort of treaty with his father, engaging promptly and readily to accede to all his wishes, if he might only be excused from all visits to ladies. (Meschler, 1891, pp. 40, 71)

RELIGION AS ENSLAVING

As you read through this series of testimonies, you may have experienced a growing sense of uneasiness. Especially in several of the later examples, one gets a picture of a very strange sort of freedom. The believer seems to be freed not from bondage but *for* bondage. The "blessed freedom" of Saint Louis of Gonzaga would appear to be extremely confining. Can one who never raised his eyes, either when walking in the streets or when in society, who renounced all conversation and every kind of social recreation with women, and who could not be alone even with his own mother, be considered in any sense free? Indeed, how free was George Fox, whom the Lord forbade to put off his hat and who felt required to say Thee and Thou? How free is a person who cannot read literary classics? How free was John Cennick, who considered dry bread too great an indulgence and began to feed on potatoes, acorns, crabs, and grass? Such "freedoms" seem extremely confining, an endless set of enslaving restrictions.

Many people see religion, especially devout religion, in just this way; it is not freeing but confining, an endless string of don'ts and can'ts. The religious person can't drink, can't smoke, can't play around, can't engage in premarital sex, and in some circles can't even go to the movies or dance. As was stated in a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine, "Most . . . unchurched people feel that organized religion is a form of mental enslavement. I

believe that what we really yearn for is freedom from religion" (December, 1977).

Such concerns have even led to the formation of groups such as Fundamentalists Anonymous, designed to free people from one form of devout religion. As described by founder and former fundamentalist Richard Yao,

In Fundamentalists Anonymous we are talking of what we call the "fundamentalist mindset"—a mindset that tends to be authoritarian, intolerant, and compulsive about control; an absolute all-or-nothing, either-or, us-against-them, I've-got-the-truth-and-you-don't mindset. (Quoted in Buie, 1987)

In 1987 Yao claimed that forty thousand people had already sought help from the organization, which was only founded in 1985, seeking to break free of their "addiction" to devout religion.

DEVOUT RELIGION AS FREEDOM WITH BONDAGE

We find, then, two very different views. The devout claim that their religion is liberating; others see it as enslaving. How are we to resolve this apparent contradiction? Is one view right and the other wrong? We think not. Instead, each view seems to tell the truth about religion—as some people experience it. As we noted in Chapter 6, people experience religion along different dimensions. For the person who relates to religion primarily as an extrinsic means to other self-centered ends, religion is likely to appear restricting. It presents a series of obligations one must fulfill in order to qualify for desired selfish ends. To illustrate, if one says Hail Marys to escape the consequences of sin, it is not surprising that this penance is perceived as a somewhat tedious burden. In line with this reasoning, there is preliminary empirical evidence that the extrinsic dimension is associated with a concept of God as "wrathful," "vindictive," and "impersonal" (Spilka & Mullin, 1977).

For the person who relates to religion primarily as an intrinsic end in itself, however, activities like saying Hail Marys are likely to be perceived quite differently, and so is the deity. Such activities may be seen as freely chosen opportunities to serve and adore a loving, merciful Father. It is at least conceivable that Saint Louis of Gonzaga, George Fox, and John Cennick, all of whom appear to be highly intrinsic in their approach to religion, felt no bondage or burden. What may appear as a restriction to the outside observer may in fact be freely chosen as a road to spiritual blessing. In the words of psychologist L. B. Brown (1964), the intrinsic believer carries his beliefs "into his every day dealings with others, gaining freedom by serving them" (p. 94). Saint Augustine put the matter even more clearly in his famous dictum, "Love God and do as you please." The person who loves God as an ultimate value may freely and willingly choose to restrict him- or herself in various ways; it becomes a source of pleasure.

Still, as psychologists we cannot simply take at face value the devout, intrinsic believer's claim that such restrictions are liberating rather than enslaving. Although they may not be experienced as confining by the believer, they may be confining nonetheless.

Of course, a believer may ask what right we have to say he is not free, when he says that he is. An analogy may help. Think about a person who is schizophrenic; he has, it may be said, freely chosen the idiosyncratic reality that he creates. He may even find some comfort, solace, and happiness within it. Still, a therapist may have good reason to believe that this reality is actually a prison, locking the person in and preventing effective coping with life. If so, the therapist does not hesitate to question the schizophrenic's reality. It may be necessary for us to do the same with the reality of the devout, intrinsic religious believer. Although this reality may provide comfort, solace, and happiness, it may also lock the believer in and prevent effective living. To decide whether it does, we must assess the effects of this reality on the individual's life; we must consider not only whether it is *experienced* as liberating or enslaving but also whether it *functions* to liberate or enslave.

Let us state our view forthrightly at the outset. We believe that devout, intrinsic religion is simultaneously liberating and enslaving. Devout beliefs may free the believer from many of the burdens of life, but in so doing, they enslave. The believer becomes less capable of free, critical reflection on the beliefs or of rethinking them, even if they are shown to be unequivocally wrong. In this way devout, intrinsic religion seems to offer freedom *with* bondage, bondage to the religious beliefs themselves.

William James suggests a similar view when he quotes a medical man: "The only radical remedy I know for dipsomania [alcoholism] is religio-mania" (James, 1902, p. 213n). In more modern terms we might say that devout religion is like methadone, an addictive drug used to replace heroin; religion is an addiction that can free the believer from other addictions. Or we might say that devout religion is like a crutch. It enables the crippled soul to rise, but having risen, the soul cannot let go of the crutch and can go only where it permits.

These statements are very strong, but we have not made them lightly. We believe that there is a sound theoretical and empirical basis for the view that devout, intrinsic religious belief produces freedom with bondage. Given the obvious importance of this issue, we shall consider the theory and research in some detail.

EVIDENCE THAT DEVOUT BELIEF PRODUCES FREEDOM WITH BONDAGE

Our view involves two basic assertions: (1) devout beliefs free the believer from existential concerns; (2) at the same time, they bind the believer to themselves, preventing free critical reflection on their truth or value. First, let us consider evidence that devout beliefs are freeing.

EVIDENCE THAT DEVOUT BELIEFS
PROVIDE FREEDOM FROM EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS

The testimonies at the beginning of this chapter provide anecdotal evidence that devout, intrinsic religious beliefs provide meaningful answers to existential questions. There is empirical evidence as well. The contribution of devout religion to a sense of existential meaning is reflected in a series of studies using Crumbaugh's (1968) Purpose-in-Life (PIL) test, a questionnaire designed to measure existential meaning and purpose. Unusually high PIL scores have been reported for a group of Dominican trainees (Crumbaugh, Raphael, & Shrader, 1970), leading Protestant parishioners (Crumbaugh, 1968), and those who believe that they have been "saved" (Soderstrom & Wright, 1977) or are "basic Biblical Christians" (Paloutzian, 1976). In four different studies (Bolt, 1975; Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975; Paloutzian, Jackson, & Crandall, 1978; and Soderstrom & Wright, 1977), PIL scores have been found to correlate positively with scores on Allport and Ross's (1967) Intrinsic scale, the most popular measure of devout, intrinsic religion (see Chapter 6). These studies suggest that devout, intrinsic believers do indeed experience more meaning in life than do nonbelievers.

The power of intrinsic religion to free the believer from existential concern is also indicated by a number of studies on death anxiety. Magni (1971) administered questionnaires designed to assess (1) attitudes toward death; (2) fear of death; and (3) death anxiety, to fifty-three student nurses in Uppsala, Sweden. He also administered Feagin's (1964) version of the Allport Extrinsic and Intrinsic scales. Magni found that higher scores on the Extrinsic scale were associated with less favorable attitudes toward death, more fear of death, and more death anxiety (all p s < .05). In contrast, higher scores on the Intrinsic scale were associated with more favorable attitudes, less fear, and less anxiety, although the last two relationships were not statistically significant.

Kahoe and Dunn (1975) administered a fear of death scale and Allport and Ross's Extrinsic and Intrinsic scales to seventy people attending church one Sunday morning in a small Kentucky town. They found a weak, nonsignificant positive correlation between fear of death and scores on the Extrinsic scale, but a significant (p < .05) negative correlation between fear of death and scores on the Intrinsic scale. Using undergraduates, Morris (1980) found the same pattern—the Extrinsic scale correlated positively and the Intrinsic scale negatively with fear of death. Spilka, Stout, Minton, and Sizemore (1977) administered the Extrinsic and Intrinsic scales to a sample of 167 adults involved in religion; they found that scores on the Extrinsic scale correlated negatively with a positive perspective on death, whereas scores on the Intrinsic scale correlated positively. Hood and Morris (1983) administered the Extrinsic and Intrinsic scales to both college students and to people older than 65. For both groups, the Intrinsic scale cor-

related negatively with fear of death ($p < .05$); correlations for the Extrinsic scale were positive but not reliable. Much the same results have been found by Kraft, Litwin, and Barber (1987), Levick and Delaney (1987), and Springer (1987). These eight studies provide consistent evidence that more intrinsically religious individuals report less concern about death, but the studies provide no clear evidence that their religious beliefs are the cause of the reduced concern. The causal relation could be the reverse as well. Perhaps, as suggested by Cook and Wimberley (1983) after their retrospective study on religious belief and parents' reactions to the death of a child, "Religious commitment is both cause and consequence of adjustment to the death" (p. 222). Or perhaps both the beliefs and reduced concern are the product of some third factor.

Clearer evidence that religious beliefs cause reduced fear of death comes from a study by Osarchuk and Tatz (1973). These researchers first measured the strength of belief in an afterlife for each of more than three hundred male and female college students (aged 18 to 22); they then selected thirty students with very high belief and thirty with very low belief and had them participate in an experiment. In the experiment, equal numbers of students from the high and low belief groups were exposed to three experimental treatments—death threat, shock threat, and no threat. Those in the death-threat condition heard a taped communication giving exaggerated estimates of the probability of an early death due to accident or disease for individuals aged 18 to 22; at the same time, students in this condition watched a series of forty-two death-related slides, including scenes of auto wrecks, realistically feigned murder and suicide victims, and corpses in a funeral home. Students in the shock-threat condition were informed that they would soon be receiving a series of potentially painful electric shocks; students in the no-threat condition were asked to perform a bland, unarousing task (trying to flip a ball into a cup, to which the ball was attached by a string). After these experiences, the students' belief in an afterlife was measured again.

Osarchuk and Tatz reasoned that if belief in an afterlife serves to allay fear of death, then those individuals initially high in belief in an afterlife who were exposed to the death-threat experience would become even higher in their belief. Such an increase should not occur, however, for those initially low in belief, nor should it occur for either high or low believers not exposed to the death threat, that is, those in the shock-threat or no-threat conditions. The results followed precisely this pattern, leading Osarchuk and Tatz to conclude that strong belief in an afterlife does indeed function to enable the believer to deal with fear of death.

Osarchuk and Tatz's conclusion received further support in a study by Schoenrade (1989). In this study participants' belief in an afterlife was first assessed. Then, at an experimental session several weeks later, participants completed a questionnaire concerning their views of death. Just prior to completing the questionnaire, some participants listened to an audiotape that led them to imagine their own death (death-threat condition); others

completed the questionnaire without imagining their own death (no death-threat condition). Among participants who had initially expressed a strong belief in an afterlife, those in the death-threat condition reported perceiving both more positive and more negative aspects of death compared with those in the no death-threat condition. Among participants who had initially expressed weak belief in an afterlife, death-threat led to a nonsignificant shift toward perceiving death as less positive.

It seems reasonable to assume that those students in these two studies who were initially high in belief in an afterlife were highly intrinsic in their orientation to religion. And if this assumption is true, then these studies provide evidence that devout, intrinsic religion functions to protect the believer from concern about death. But is this assumption true? As a check, Batson, Duncan, Levy, Major, and Miller (1980) administered the belief in afterlife scale used by Osarchuk and Tatz, as well as Allport and Ross's (1967) Extrinsic and Intrinsic scales, to seventy-two undergraduates. As expected, the Intrinsic scale showed a strong positive correlation with belief in afterlife scores ($r = .72, p < .001$); the Extrinsic scale correlated negatively ($r = -.32, p < .01$). These results suggest that the assumption is correct; those high in belief in an afterlife are highly intrinsic in their approach to religion.

Even clearer evidence that devout, intrinsic religion functions to protect the believer from concern about death was reported by Batson, Burris, Wagoner, and Wolgast (1991). They conducted a conceptual replication of the Osarchuk and Tatz study described above except, instead of measuring the effects of a death threat on belief in an afterlife, they measured the effect on the three dimensions of personal religion discussed in Chapter 6—as an extrinsic means, an intrinsic end, and a quest. They found that among individuals with a confident belief in an afterlife, exposure to a death threat increased scores on the intrinsic, end dimension ($p < .05$); it did not increase scores on either of the other two dimensions. These results indicate that devout, intrinsic religion functions to buffer anxiety over death—as long as one has a confident belief in an afterlife.

When these results are combined with results of the eight correlational studies and results of the experiments reported by Osarchuk and Tatz (1973) and Schoenrade (1989), we have quite strong support for our first assertion, that devout, intrinsic religion can provide freedom from at least one major existential concern, fear of death. In addition, the results of these studies indicate that neither extrinsic nor quest religion is associated with such freedom; if anything, extrinsic religion is associated with an increase in existential anxiety.

The evidence that devout religious belief can provide freedom from fear of death is quite consistent with Freud's analysis of the function of religion in *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which was discussed in Chapter 2. It is also consistent with Ernest Becker's analysis in *The Denial of Death* (1973) and with the recent analysis based on Becker's work by Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski (1991), which

they call terror-management theory. Like Freud and Becker, Solomon et al. suggest that both culture (including religious institutions) and personality (including self-concept, self-esteem, and deeply held beliefs) are the result of our attempt to deal with the existential anxiety that awareness of mortality brings.

We would, however, suggest a more general conclusion. Fear of one's own mortality is not the only source of existential anxiety. As Freud (1961) noted, our physical and social environment can be full of upsetting, potentially frightening events that are not directly life-threatening. These events confront us with a whole host of troubling questions: How do we explain our inability to succeed when we think we should? Or our bad luck in having a dead battery on the morning of an all-important interview? Or a tragic accident that takes the life of an innocent child?

Religion can provide anxiety-reducing explanations for such seemingly inexplicable events. Devout, intrinsic believers are likely to attribute them to "God's will," to "God's judgment," or even to "God's blessing" (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Pargament & Hahn, 1986; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985), making these events easier to bear. Consistent with this suggestion, Park, Cohen, and Herb (1990) recently presented evidence that, at least among Protestant undergraduates, intrinsic religion helps buffer the depressing effects of uncontrollable life stresses "by providing a framework of meaning, helping individuals make sense of negative experiences" (p. 572; also see Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen, Reilly, Van Haitsma, & Warren, 1990).

To the degree that devout beliefs provide something of value by freeing the believer from existential concerns, the believer has something valuable to lose. This leads to our second assertion, that devout, intrinsic beliefs are binding, rendering the believer incapable of free, open reflection on their truth.

EVIDENCE THAT DEVOUT BELIEFS ARE PSYCHOLOGICALLY BINDING

Theoretical basis. The theoretical basis for the contention that deeply held beliefs are psychologically binding lies in the need for cognitive consistency. Since the mid-1950s social psychologists have recognized that we humans have a need to maintain some consistency in our cognitively constructed reality. If the reality is to function, the various cognitive elements that make it up must fit together into a coherent whole; they must make sense in relation to one another. The most dramatic and influential statement of this principle of cognitive consistency was made by Leon Festinger (1957), who contrasted cognitive consonance with *cognitive dissonance*.

According to Festinger, two cognitive elements are in a dissonant relation if "the obverse of one element would follow from the other" (1957, p. 13). That is, dissonance results when a person simultaneously accepts as true two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another. Festinger suggested

that cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant, aversive state that the person tries to escape. The person can escape dissonance either by changing one of the cognitions or by adding new cognitions consonant (i.e., in agreement) with whichever of the cognitions is most resistant to change. Adding new consonant cognitions cannot eliminate dissonance entirely, but it can swamp the dissonant elements and thereby diminish their effect.

Festinger made it clear that his theory of cognitive dissonance deals with *psychological* rather than logical inconsistency. Logical inconsistency between important cognitions is likely to produce dissonance, but cognitions that are not logically inconsistent can also be dissonant. For example, there is no logical inconsistency between the two cognitions "I believe that research has demonstrated that smoking causes cancer" and "I smoke." But there is considerable psychological inconsistency, as long as I also believe that I am not the sort of person who would intentionally do something to give myself cancer.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance suggests important psychological consequences of holding devout religious beliefs. The individual who approaches religion as an intrinsic end in itself places central importance and value on his or her religious beliefs; they are the pivotal truth around which reality and life revolve. Imagine what would happen if such an individual were presented with clear, irrefutable evidence that these religious beliefs were wrong, that the Truth was false. Would he or she reassess the beliefs and, reluctantly perhaps, bring them in line with the new information? The theory of cognitive dissonance suggests not. In Festinger's words,

Man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed, he may even show a new fervor about convincing and converting other people to his view. (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956, p. 3)

Festinger and his associates were quite clear about the conditions under which such a process would occur.

1. There must be a firm conviction.
2. There must be public commitment to this conviction.
3. The conviction must be amenable to unequivocal disconfirmation.
4. Such unequivocal disconfirmation must occur.
5. Social support must be available to the believer subsequent to the disconfirmation. (Festinger et al., 1956, p. 216)

Under these circumstances Festinger predicted that the devout believer would not loosen his grip on the belief but would be driven, in an attempt to reduce dissonance, to hold the belief even more firmly.

Festinger's prediction of intensification of belief in the face of unequivocal disconfirmation is based on the assumption that devout religious beliefs are highly resistant to change. What makes them so resistant? Three characteristics seem especially important. First, devout, intrinsic religious beliefs provide important personal benefits to the believer. These benefits take two forms. As we have noted, religious beliefs provide meaningful answers to a range of existential concerns. In so doing, they also provide a sense of personal significance. Personal esteem is enhanced by believing that one has some special insight into the mysteries of life, that one knows the Truth. A person is not likely to let go of an esteem-enhancing belief easily.

Second, deeply held religious beliefs are resistant to change because they almost always involve public commitment. Typically, the devout believer has acted on his or her beliefs in a number of ways: attending worship services, engaging in personal devotions, reading religious literature, perhaps even trying to convert other people. Friends and acquaintances, both inside and outside the family of faith, know where the devout believer stands. Such public commitment makes it difficult subsequently to deny that one took the beliefs seriously. To change them, the believer would have to admit being wrong.

Third, the devout believer typically does not pursue his or her faith in isolation. The believer is involved in a community of individuals who hold the same beliefs. When the beliefs are challenged, the community serves as an important source of social support. Even if the believer has doubts, he or she has only to look to the community to be reminded that others still believe. Ironically, other community members may be having the same doubts, but a process called *pluralistic ignorance* may keep their doubts from being recognized. Here is how.

Picture the situation in which a group of devout believers is confronted with belief-disconfirming information. Each believer may experience doubt. But, unsure what to do, each masks this doubt while looking to other members of the group to see how they are responding. Meanwhile, the other group members are doing the same. To each believer, the other group members appear calm and unruffled by the new information. So each concludes that the disconfirming information must not be as devastating as he or she thought. Through this process of pluralistic ignorance, believers in a group are more resistant to disconfirming information than believers who are alone.¹

1. The importance of group support in increasing resistance to information that challenges one's beliefs was nicely illustrated in an experiment by Harold Kelley (1955). Catholic high school students' opinions about censorship, parental control, traditional religious practices, and church loyalty were challenged by having them complete an opinion questionnaire on which responses were already marked. These responses were said to indicate the average opinion of a large number of other high school students. Moreover, the responses were always fairly divergent from responses most acceptable to Catholics. Before being given the questionnaire, some students were given a short reading that highlighted the activities of the Catholic Church; this reading was intended to make their group identity as Catholics more salient. Other students were given a reading that had nothing to do with church or religion. The students reminded of

These three characteristics—personal benefits derived from the beliefs, public commitment to the beliefs, and social support from the community of believers—make deeply held religious beliefs highly resistant to change. Of course, irrefutable disconfirming information is also highly resistant to change. Given the unacceptability of surrendering either cognition, Festinger's theory predicts that the dissonance produced by disconfirming information will be reduced by adding new cognitions consonant with the set of cognitions that is most resistant to change. For the highly devout, intrinsic believer the set most resistant to change is likely to be the religious beliefs. And if it is, presenting this believer with information that irrefutably disconfirms the beliefs should lead, not to rejection or even weakening of the beliefs, but to bolstering them with additional consonant cognitions. As Festinger says, the believer should come away "even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before."

Empirical evidence. Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance provides a theoretical basis for our contention that deeply held religious beliefs can be binding because it suggests that once a person holds such beliefs, clear evidence that they are wrong only ties the person more tightly to them. But the basis for this contention is not only theoretical; there is empirical evidence as well, evidence from historical examples, field studies, and quasi-experimental studies.

Historical examples. First, let us consider two historical examples of belief intensification in the face of disconfirming information. These examples were cited by Festinger et al. (1956). One concerns the development of Montanism, a second-century Christian sect.

Montanus, who appeared in the second half of the second century, does not appear as an innovator in matters of belief. His one personal contribution to the life of the time was the fixed conviction that the second coming of Our Lord was at hand. The event was to take place at Pepuza—near the modern Angora—and thither all true followers of Our Lord should make their way. His authority for the statement was an alleged private inspiration, and the new prophet's personality and eloquence won him a host of disciples, who flocked in such numbers to the appointed spot that a new town sprang up to house them. *Nor did the delay of the second advent put an end to the movement. On the contrary, it gave it new life and form as a kind of Christianity of the elite, whom no other authority guided in their new life but the Holy Spirit working directly upon them. . . .* (Hughes, 1954, p. 10, italics added)

their religious group identity as Catholics were less likely to shift their opinions toward the responses marked on their questionnaire. Presumably, reminding them that there were others who held the same opinions as they did enabled them to resist the peer pressure to modify their beliefs. Jean-Pierre Deconchy (1980) has also reported research indicating that threatening the beliefs of orthodox believers leads them to rely even more heavily on their religious reference group for social support.

The second historical example concerns the Millerite movement in the mid-nineteenth century. William Miller was a New England farmer with a belief in the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In 1818 he concluded from his study of the scriptures that the end of the world would come about 1843. As the time for the End approached, public interest in Miller's predictions grew, and by 1840 the Millerites had become a recognizable religious movement. The beginning of 1843 ushered in considerable interest in the specific date of the Advent. Up to that point Miller had simply said that the Second Coming would be "about the year 1843." On January 1, 1843, however, Miller published a synopsis of his beliefs, in which he stated his expectations about the date as follows:

I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming. And I am fully convinced that sometime between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come, and bring all His Saints with Him; and that then He will reward every man as his work shall be. (Miller, 1843, p. 147)

Although Miller had resisted setting a specific day, a number of his followers expected the End to come on April 23, 1843. When this day came and went, these followers reacted as follows:

At first there was evidence of surprise and disappointment among the Millerites, but it quickly gave way to renewed confidence. "After all," they reminded one another, "there is a whole year in which to look for the Coming;—we looked for it too soon, that was all."—and the singing and exhorting took on a new fervor. (Sears, 1924, p. 119)

Next, a number of Millerites placed their hopes on December 31, 1843. When this day came and went, Miller issued a statement:

Brethren, the Roman [year] 1843 is past [the Jewish sacred year would end in the spring of 1844] and our hopes are not realized. Shall we give up the ship? No, no. . . . We do not yet believe our reckoning has run out. It takes all of 457 and 1843 to make 2300, and must of course run as far into '44 as it began in the year 457 before Christ. (Quoted in Nichol, 1944, p. 160n)

Again, fervor increased; Millerite conferences in New York and Philadelphia were crowded, and in Washington there had to be a last-minute change to a larger hall.

But March 21, 1844, the last day in the year specified by Miller, also came and went with no sign of the Second Coming. What happened? The reaction of non-Millerites was strong and unequivocal. They made jokes and taunted and jeered Miller and his followers: "What—not gone up yet?—We thought you'd gone up! Aren't you going up soon?—Wife didn't go up and leave you behind to burn, did she?" (Sears, 1924, p. 144). Among the Millerites there was strong and severe disappointment, but this was of brief duration. Soon the energy and enthusiasm were greater than ever before. During the summer of 1844 the faithful expended more and more energy to convert people to their beliefs. A number were so convinced that the End

was imminent that they did not plant crops; some even sold their possessions.

Toward the end of the summer, many of the faithful were accepting October 22, 1844, as the date for the Second Coming. When this day passed without event, the Millerite movement finally began to wither and die. But it had taken a series of disconfirmations over a period of eighteen months to shake the beliefs of the faithful. The early disconfirmations seemed to lead, as dissonance theory would predict, to an intensification of belief.

Field Studies. Historical examples are suggestive, but there is always the danger of biased selection, that only examples clearly consistent with the theory in question are chosen. As a social scientist, Festinger naturally wished to study the process of belief intensification at first hand. And while working out the basic ideas of his theory of cognitive dissonance, he unexpectedly got the chance. A newspaper in a nearby city carried a back-page story with the headline: PROPHECY FROM PLANET. CLARION CALL TO CITY: FLEE THAT FLOOD. IT'LL SWAMP US ON DEC. 21, OUTER SPACE TELLS SUBURBANITE. The accompanying story explained:

Lake City will be destroyed by a flood from Great Lake just before dawn, Dec. 21, according to a suburban housewife. Mrs. Marian Keech, of 847 West School Street, says the prophecy is not her own. It is the purport of many messages she has received by automatic writing, she says. . . . The messages, according to Mrs. Keech, are sent to her by superior beings from a planet called "Clarion." These beings have been visiting earth, she says, in what we call flying saucers. During their visits, she says, they have observed fault lines in the earth's crust that foretold the deluge. Mrs. Keech reports she was told the flood will spread to form an inland sea stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, she says, a cataclysm will submerge the West Coast from Seattle, Washington, to Chile in South America. (Quoted in Festinger et al., 1956, pp. 30-31, with names changed)

This seemed to be just the sort of situation that Festinger was looking for; here was public commitment to the occurrence of specific events on a particular date. Assuming that the flood did not take place, Mrs. Keech would be faced with unequivocal disconfirmation of her beliefs. Festinger and two of his associates, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter, went to see Mrs. Keech. They found her cordial but not at all interested in trying to persuade them to adopt her beliefs. Indeed, she had not been the one to release the story to the press; that was done by a friend and fellow believer, Dr. Armstrong.

Festinger and his associates learned that in addition to Mrs. Keech and Dr. Armstrong, there were a number of other people interested in Mrs. Keech's messages from outer space; these people belonged to a group called the Seekers. Actually, there were two small groups, one in Lake City led by Mrs. Keech, and one in Collegeville, a nearby university town, led by Dr. Armstrong (again, all names are fictitious). Dr. Armstrong worked at the University health center, and most of the members of the Collegeville group were university students. Based on Mrs. Keech's messages, the Seekers not

only believed that the great flood was coming on December 21; they also believed that the faithful would be spared, rescued by a flying saucer at midnight on December 20. Festinger and his associates quickly joined the Seekers so as to be present on the night of December 20 to witness firsthand the group's response to unequivocal disconfirmation of their publicly stated beliefs.

As you might imagine, field research of this kind presents some practical difficulties. The social psychologists wished to keep accurate, verbatim records of what groups members said and did, but they did not wish to "blow their cover." Further, although they wanted to be accepted as members of the group, they did not want to influence the beliefs of other group members. In order to get as accurate a record as possible, they frequently resorted to hiding in the bathroom or on the porch, where they frantically scribbled notes. The effort to avoid too direct participation reached a droll climax when one of the social psychologists was asked to act as a medium and receive messages from outer space. He kept a long silence. Finally, Mrs. Keech said with some irritation, "What do you see?" "Nothing," he replied. "That's not nothing," he was told, "that's the Void" (Festinger et al., 1956, p. 243).

When December 20 arrived, many of the Seekers from Collegeville were home on Christmas vacation, but ten of those who lived in Lake City assembled at Mrs. Keech's house and prepared to be picked up by the flying saucers. They readied themselves by rehearsing passwords and removing metal from their clothing. (Mrs. Keech had been informed that metallic objects would be dangerous on the saucer.) When midnight was close, the group went into the backyard to wait, but it was a bitterly cold night, so they soon returned inside. As the clock hand approached twelve, the ten believers sat in strained expectation of a knock at the door. The clock ticked past the hour, and for a few minutes there was discussion of who had the right time and whose watch was fast. Soon, however, it became clear that midnight had passed without the prophesied arrival of the saucer.

At first, the believers seemed stunned; their faces were frozen and expressionless. Gradually and painfully, despair and disappointment engulfed them. They re-examined the messages that Mrs. Keech had received, searching for some explanation. Near 4:00 A.M. Mrs. Keech began to cry, saying bitterly that she knew that some of the group were beginning to doubt her. But at 4:45 she summoned the group together and, with radiant face, read a new message that she had received:

For this day it is established that there is but one God of Earth, and He is in thy midst, and from His hand thou hast written these words. And mighty is the word of God—and by His word have ye been saved—for from the mouth of death have ye been delivered and at no time has there been such a force loosed upon the Earth. (Quoted in Festinger et al., 1956, p. 169)

The message went on in this King James-style English to explain that the flood had been averted because of the impressive faith of the small group of believers; they had saved the country from disaster.

This explanation was received by the group with great enthusiasm. Soon the believers began to take turns telephoning newspapers and wire services to publicize their explanation of the failure of the prophecy. Although they had avoided publicity and proselytizing previously, they now turned to their task with vigor. In Mrs. Keech's words, "Now it is important."

The role of social support in the process of belief intensification was made clear by the reactions of the Seekers who were not present that night. All of them responded to the disconfirmation either by relinquishing their beliefs or by having greatly diminished faith in Mrs. Keech's prophecies.

The reaction of the Seekers who were present seems to provide dramatic support for Festinger's predictions. Still, two observations should be made. First, it is not really true that the Seekers emerged from the disconfirmation experience even more convinced of the truth of their beliefs than before, at least not all of their beliefs. For example, they did not maintain their belief in the flood. Instead, what occurred was a reinterpretation that allowed them to maintain their basic beliefs in communication with powerful extraterrestrial beings, while at the same time taking account of the disconfirmation. Of course, you might feel that Mrs. Keech and her followers would have been well advised to drop their beliefs entirely, as did most of the Seekers who were not present that night. We would agree. But it is important to note that Mrs. Keech and her followers did not resort to total irrationality, maintaining that the flood had occurred; instead, they resorted to rationalization.

Second, results of this study cannot really be considered an independent test of predictions from dissonance theory because the experience of the Seekers contributed to development of the theory. This study was conducted while the theory was being formulated, and several of the specific predictions that seem so dramatically supported were actually derived from reflection on what happened to Mrs. Keech and her followers. This has not proved to be a serious problem, however, because the essential pattern of results found by Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter has also been found in several subsequent studies.

In a second field study, Hardyck and Braden (1962) observed members of a Pentecostal sect after one of the group's leaders prophesied that there would be a major nuclear attack in six months. Upon receiving this message, more than a hundred members of the group promptly packed up their belongings and moved to a remote area in the southwestern United States, where they constructed an elaborate bomb shelter. When the date of the nuclear attack drew nigh, approximately 135 believers entered the shelter. Of these, 103 remained in the shelter for forty-two days, until it was clear that the attack was not coming.

As with the Seekers, when these faithful emerged from the shelter they had developed a reinterpretation that allowed them to maintain and even intensify their faith while at the same time rationalizing the unequivocal disconfirmation. They claimed, first, that there had never been a clear,

unequivocal message of impending attack; second, that God had used them to warn an unvigilant world; and third, that God was testing their faith. They concluded that they had passed the test and were now especially worthy in the eyes of God. Interestingly, they continued to believe that a nuclear attack would be forthcoming, yet this did not prompt them to return to their shelter.

Once again, as predicted by dissonance theory, disconfirmation led to a rationalizing reinterpretation and, if anything, a strengthening of belief. But in one respect the group studied by Hardyck and Braden did not conform to Festinger's predictions. There was no increase in proselytizing after the disconfirmation. Hardyck and Braden suggest that this may have been due to the separatism of the group, which produced extremely high within-group cohesion and support, and to the lack of harassment from the surrounding community. Apparently, this group was able to reduce all dissonance without resorting to proselytizing.

Quasi-Experimental Studies. These historical examples and field studies deal with religious movements that appealed to only a small fraction of the population. You may be hesitant to generalize from the behavior of such individuals to the devout, intrinsically religious as a whole. Further, although field studies allow an investigator to examine the effects of belief disconfirmation firsthand, the investigator's observations may still be subject to bias. In each of the studies described, the investigators had clear expectations of what would happen. It is difficult to be sure that these expectations did not lead to some selective perception. Fortunately, several quasi-experimental studies have been conducted, which are less subject to these criticisms. The results again provide evidence for rationalization in the face of belief disconfirmation.

In one, Norman Feather (1964) examined the tendency of highly devout individuals to judge the truth or falsity of arguments about religion on the basis of whether the conclusions were consistent with their beliefs rather than on the logical merits of the argument. He had 131 religious and 34 nonreligious Australian university students judge the logical validity of forty syllogisms. Twelve of the syllogisms were proreligious in their conclusion and twelve antireligious; the remaining sixteen were not about religion at all. Further, half of the syllogisms in each category were logically valid, and half were invalid. Examples of syllogisms of each type are presented in Table 7.1. For each of the syllogisms the students were instructed: "You may or may not agree with the premises. What is important is to determine whether the argument is logically sound or logically unsound."

Feather expected that religious students would be more likely to make proreligious than antireligious errors; that is, they would be more likely to judge valid antireligious syllogisms to be unsound and invalid proreligious syllogisms to be sound (proreligious errors) than to judge valid proreligious syllogisms to be unsound and invalid antireligious syllogisms to be sound (antireligious errors). His results strongly supported this expectation ($p <$

Table 7.1 Examples of syllogisms used by Feather (1964) to test logical distortion of belief-relevant arguments by highly religious individuals

Proreligious syllogisms	
Valid	People who are without religion are spiritually devoid and need the Christian teachings to show them the true way of life. Atheists and agnostics are people without religion and devoid of spiritual life. Therefore, atheists and agnostics need Christian teachings to show them the true way of life.
Invalid	A charitable and tolerant attitude toward mankind helps to bring people together in love and harmony. Christianity always helps to bring people together in love and harmony. Therefore, a consequence of Christianity is a charitable and tolerant attitude toward mankind.
Antireligious syllogisms	
Valid	The reality of any phenomenon is established by scientific investigation and treatment. The existence of God is not established by scientific investigation and treatment. Therefore, the existence of God is not real.
Invalid	If thorough scientific investigation cannot prove that the Christian religion is superstition then belief in Christian miracles is justified. But thorough scientific investigation is able to prove that the Christian religion is superstition, so it follows that belief in Christian miracles is not justified.
Neutral syllogisms	
Valid	All members of the finance committee are members of the executive committee. No members of the library committee are members of the executive committee. Therefore, no members of the library committee are members of the finance committee.
Invalid	Some artists are unconventional and all portrait painters are known to be artists. It follows, therefore, that some portrait painters are unconventional.

Source: Adapted from Feather (1964).

.001); moreover, the tendency to make proreligious errors was especially strong among the most devout religious students. These students were almost twice as likely to make proreligious as antireligious errors.

Feather did not find the reverse effect among nonreligious students. They tended to make the same number of proreligious and antireligious errors. Given the population from which the students came, however, Feather did not think that the members of his nonreligious group were intensely opposed to religion. He suggested that a group of "devout" atheists would likely make a predominance of antireligious errors.

Feather's study provides clear evidence that the highly religious are likely to judge the truth or falsity of an argument about religion, at least in part, on whether the conclusion of the argument is consistent with their beliefs. One interpretation of this finding is that the need for cognitive consistency undermines these individuals' ability to judge a logical argument on its logical merits. But there is another possible interpretation. The errors observed by Feather among the highly religious may have been honest ones. The content of the valid antireligious syllogisms may have been quite unfa-

miliar to them; if so, these syllogisms could have been harder for them to understand. Difficulty in understanding could have led to more errors, just as it might if the syllogisms concerned some highly technical subject.

A second quasi-experimental study provides clearer evidence of belief intensification in the face of disconfirming evidence. In this study, Batson (1975) examined the reactions to belief disconfirming information of fifty female high school students who were members of a mainstream Protestant denomination. The study took place during weekend retreats held by several Presbyterian churches in New Jersey. On each retreat, the research was conducted with the cooperation of the youth minister in charge, who served as the leader of the research session.

As participants came into a large room for the session, they were asked to seat themselves in one of two locations depending on how they would answer the question "Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?" This separation into believing and nonbelieving groups served two purposes. First, it forced each individual to make a visible, public commitment to her belief or nonbelief, one of the requirements for belief intensification specified by Festinger. Second, it provided at least some sense of group identity with others holding similar beliefs, fulfilling the requirement of having group support. After all participants had assigned themselves to one of the two groups, the leader introduced the research, emphasizing its potentially unsettling nature. Participants were told that if they became uneasy or afraid, they should feel free to excuse themselves. He then told them what their task would be.

Their task was to complete a questionnaire "devised to be given to small groups in several areas of the United States. Its purpose is to measure the effect of certain information on parts of the American public to determine whether the information should be circulated generally." The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part contained thirty items designed to measure intensity of orthodox Christian belief. The items focused on two specific beliefs, belief that Jesus was divine and that the Bible was the infallible Word of God. Typical items included: "Jesus actually performed miracles." "The Bible contains many errors" (reversed). "The Bible is the Word of God." "Jesus was only human" (reversed). Participants were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with each statement using a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). An approximate balance was maintained between positive and negative wordings to control for response bias.

After everyone had completed Part One of the questionnaire, they were instructed to turn to Part Two, in which they read the following article, "written anonymously and denied publication in the *New York Times* at the request of the World Council of Churches because of the obvious crushing effect that it would have on the entire Christian world":

—Geneva, Switzerland. It was learned today here in Geneva from a top source in the World Council of Churches offices that scholars in Jordan have

conclusively proved that the major writings in what is today called the New Testament are fraudulent.

According to the information gained from the unnamed source within the headquarters of the World Council of Churches, Professor R. R. Lowry (author of *The Zorandike Fragments and the Dead Sea Scrolls*), assisted by other scholars, has been carefully analyzing a collection of papyrus scrolls discovered in a cave in the Jordanian desert near where the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Contained within this collection of scrolls, Lowry and his associates have found letters, apparently written between the composers of various New Testament books, bluntly stating: "Since our great teacher Jesus of Nazareth was killed by the Romans, I am sure we were justified in stealing away his body and claiming that he rose from the dead. For, although his death clearly proves he was not the Son of God as we had hoped, if we did not claim that he was, both his great teaching and our lives as his disciples would be wasted!"

Though Lowry initially suspected the authenticity of these scrolls, he was later quoted as saying, "Through radiocarbon dating and careful study of the Aramaic dialect used in writing these letters, I have found it impossible to deny that the manuscripts are authentic. You can't imagine what a struggle this has been; I find no alternative but to renounce my former belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. I can no longer be a Christian."

When Dr. Ernest Carson Baker, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, was confronted with Lowry's statement by this reporter, he at first denied that it was true. After a few minutes of questioning, however, he broke down and admitted, "This thing has got us so upset we're just not sure what to do. We just can't let this story get out!" Apparently the only avenue open to the Church in the twentieth century is the same avenue that it took in the first century—conceal the facts and proclaim Jesus as the divine Son of God, even though it knows such a claim is a lie.

This article was designed to present information that, if believed, would clearly disconfirm both belief in Jesus as divine and in the infallibility of the Bible.

After reading the article, participants were instructed to complete Part Three of the questionnaire. Part Three served two purposes. First, it contained twenty more items concerning belief in Jesus' divinity and the infallibility of the Bible. These items, drawn from the same pool as the thirty items in Part One of the questionnaire, were included to measure intensity of belief after reading the article. Twelve other items in Part Three served a second purpose; they were designed to assess participants' reactions to the article. These items ranged from "Lowry's discovery truly proves that Jesus was not the Son of God" to "The article was probably written by a communist." Such items were included for two reasons: First, they were consistent with the stated purpose of the research project, to determine public reaction to the article on a small scale before deciding about its wider dissemination. Second, they allowed assessment of participants' acceptance of the veracity of the article. According to dissonance theory, one would expect reactions to be quite different for believers who thought the article

was true as opposed to those who thought it was untrue. Disagreement with one item, "The article is untrue," was the criterion for concluding that an individual accepted the article as true.

After all participants had completed Part Three, the leader encouraged them to express reactions to the questionnaire. Then he assured everyone that the article in Part Two was totally untrue, and he outlined reasons for the administration of the questionnaire and for the deception involved in the research. In his explanation he included a brief description of the field study by Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956). He then went on to suggest possible implications of participants' reactions for understanding the way religious beliefs function, and a lively discussion of the nature of religious beliefs and reactions to belief-disconfirming evidence followed. Care was taken to encourage anyone disturbed by the research to discuss it personally with the leader. This precaution proved unnecessary, however, for participants expressed considerable interest in the research and enthusiasm in discussing its implications. All seemed to understand the reason for the deception involved, and none appeared upset by it.

Assuming that disconfirming information leads to belief intensification in the way that dissonance theory predicts, what results should we see in this study? Any change in belief should depend on the participant's initial belief and her acceptance of the truth of the article in Part Two. Taking these two variables into account, the participants were divided into three groups. First, there were eight nonbelievers, individuals who answered no to the initial question of whether Jesus was the Son of God. We would not expect the article in Part Two to arouse any dissonance for them because it was not inconsistent with their initial beliefs. Second, there were thirty-one believers who said that they did not accept the veracity of the article. We would not expect them to experience dissonance either because, although the article contained information inconsistent with their initial belief, they did not accept the information as true. There were, however, eleven believers who said that they did accept the article as true. These eleven should have experienced dissonance between their publicly stated belief in the divinity of Jesus and the information in the article revealing that this belief was based on a hoax. If clear disconfirmation leads to belief intensification, we would expect these eleven participants to express stronger religious belief after reading the article than they did before. We would not expect to see an increase for either of the other two groups.

Mean religious belief scores on Part One and Part Three of the questionnaire for members of each of the three groups are presented in Table 7.2. The *t*-scores and *p*-values presented in the last two columns of the table reveal the statistical significance of changes in stated belief from Part One to Part Three. Both the nonbelievers and the believers who said that they doubted the disconfirming information indicated less belief after having read the article in Part Two; this difference was statistically significant for the nonbelievers ($p < .01$). Results were quite different for the believers who said that they accepted the article as true. As dissonance theory pre-

Table 7.2. Differences between the pretest and posttest scores of religious belief for believers and nonbelievers

Groups	Mean pretest scores	Mean posttest scores	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Nonbelievers (<i>n</i> = 8)	3.37	2.91	-3.70	<.01
Believers doubting the belief-disconfirming information (<i>n</i> = 31)	3.97	3.90	-1.17	ns
Believers accepting the belief-disconfirming information (<i>n</i> = 11)	4.07	4.30	3.61	<.005

Source: Adapted from Batson (1975).

dicted, these individuals appeared to become stronger in their beliefs. Although members of this group had indicated strong religious belief on Part One of the questionnaire (mean response approximately 4.0 on a five-point scale), they indicated even stronger belief after reading the belief-disconfirming article ($p < .005$).

How did the believers who indicated that they accepted the veracity of the article and yet became stronger in their statement of belief justify this apparent discrepancy? Data were not available to answer this question. Indeed, it seems quite possible that most of the individuals did not have time to work out the discrepancy before they were informed that the article was, in fact, false. Recall that it took Mrs. Keech over four hours to develop a plausible and effective rationalization, and the dissonance of participants in this study was relieved much sooner than that—when they were informed that the article was untrue.

Results paralleling those of this quasi-experimental study have been found in a clever series of quasi-experiments by Jean-Pierre Deconchy (1980). Deconchy found that when Catholic clergy were confronted with evidence challenging the security of their orthodox beliefs (either by pointing out logical contradictions in the Bible or by leading them to believe their peers in the clergy held more liberal beliefs) they intensified their strict allegiance to these beliefs as the basis of church membership.

In the quasi-experimental studies described so far, exposure to belief-disconfirming information was unavoidable. But, if given a choice, the devout believer might be expected to avoid encountering such information and the dissonance that would result (Festinger, 1957). Schoenrade (1987) found evidence consistent with this reasoning in a study in which participants were asked to choose one of two essays to read. The title and written comments (ostensibly from other students who had read the essay) revealed that one essay was clearly supportive of belief in afterlife; the other was clearly opposed. As dissonance theory would predict, the stronger a participant's belief in afterlife the more likely the participant was not to choose the antibelief essay ($p < .05$), which could threaten this belief.

Recently, McFarland and Warren (1992) conducted a similar study with

a sample of adult fundamentalist Christians living in small towns and rural areas in south-central Kentucky and north-central Tennessee. Ostensibly as part of a project to select articles for a new periodical, *Christian Reflection*, participants were asked to rate how much they would or would not like to read each of twenty-four articles. Titles and abstracts revealed that six of the articles support fundamentalist beliefs and six opposed these beliefs; the remaining twelve were on nonreligious topics of current interest. For example, the abstract for a belief-supporting article, "The Prophetic Vision," said that the article documented the accuracy of Old Testament prophecies of Jesus, whereas the abstract for a belief-challenging article, "The Illusion of Prophecy," said the article argued that "there are no true prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament." Overall, these fundamentalist Christians preferred the belief-supporting articles. Moreover, higher scores on Allport's Intrinsic scale were positively correlated with desire to read the belief-supporting articles but not the belief-challenging ones.

To summarize the empirical evidence, the historical examples, field studies, and quasi-experimental studies all point to the same conclusion: a deeply held religious belief can, indeed, be binding. Faced with belief-disconfirming information, the devout believer is not free to critically re-examine and perhaps reject the belief. Instead, he or she is likely to be driven to even stronger belief.

One need not assume, of course, that the devout, intrinsic believer perceives his or her beliefs to be binding. On the contrary, the beliefs are likely to be seen as the freely chosen foundation on which the individual's entire reality is built. Mrs. Keech would doubtless say that she had freely chosen her beliefs, and in a sense she had. She would probably also say that she was in no way bound by them, that they were instead a source of liberating strength. But a more objective view suggests that her beliefs had her trapped and were pushing her farther and farther into a personally constricting, delusional reality. And does not a more objective view suggest a similar conclusion about the restricting effects of any deeply held religious beliefs? Do not such beliefs chain the devout, intrinsic believer to one view of reality, prohibiting adaptive change in response to new information?

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE: AN EXPLANATION FOR THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY?

In reading the evidence for intensification of belief in the face of disconfirmation, you may have wondered why such an analysis could not be applied to the origin of major world religions. Consider, for example, Christianity. Records indicate that in his brief ministry Jesus attracted a large number of enthusiastic and hopeful followers; they looked to him as their savior. Then he was seized by the Roman soldiers and put to death. Would this not create considerable cognitive dissonance, especially for his closest followers and disciples, those who had given up all to follow him? And if it created disso-

nance, would these followers not be motivated to develop some face-saving reinterpretation in which their belief in Jesus as savior would be intensified and their proselytizing efforts would increase? And could this not account for the fact that after a period of initial confusion and disappointment, Jesus' death was no longer a stumbling block for his followers but the pillar of their faith, the culminating event in which he atoned for the sins of the world and conquered the power of death through resurrection?

Festinger et al. (1956) noted the possibility of a dissonance interpretation of the origin of Christianity, but they were careful to emphasize its speculative nature and to caution against quick and uncritical adoption of such a view. Wernik (1975), however, argued that dissonance principles not only can but *do* account for the rise of Christianity. Employing Robert Abelson's (1959) analysis of four strategies available to reduce inconsistency between existing beliefs and disconfirming information—denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence—Wernik builds a case that these strategies underlie the development of a number of key beliefs among the early Christians. Beliefs that Wernik claims are a product of dissonance reduction include the following: (1) Jesus was not only a great teacher but the Messiah predicted by the prophets; (2) Jesus had an extraordinary and prodigious birth and childhood; (3) Jesus was endorsed as savior by God, holy men (e.g., John the Baptist), and himself; (4) Jesus' death was transitory and for a purpose, and (5) Jesus knew about, predicted, and chose his own death. Wernik contends that these and similar beliefs served to rationalize the dashed hopes of Jesus' followers and that out of this intensification and rationalization, Christianity was born.

What is one to make of Wernik's argument? Certainly, many of the events surrounding the death of Jesus and the emergence of early Christianity can be fitted into a dissonance analysis. Yet we would echo the caution of Festinger et al. (1956); it is important to resist an overly quick and facile interpretation. Because events can be fitted into a dissonance framework does not, by itself, prove that this is the correct or even the best interpretation of them. Still, Wernik's (1975) analysis provides much food for thought, and just as it should not be prematurely adopted, it should not be prematurely rejected.

DEVELOPMENT OF ENSLAVING BELIEFS: SOME FACTORS IN THE BELIEF ESCALATION PROCESS

In our discussion so far we have been looking at the effect of disconfirming information on devout religious belief once the beliefs are well formed. But we also need to consider how beliefs that are so deeply held that they lead one to distort and deny disconfirming information can develop in the first place. We would suggest that the same forces that lead to intensification can, when they operate over a longer period of time, account for the emergence of deeply held, devout beliefs. The need for cognitive consistency, although a seemingly benign principle, creates pressure toward escalation and inten-

sification of *any* publicly stated belief, even if the belief is initially stated tentatively and with considerable reservation. Like the swirling waters of a whirlpool, this need subtly but powerfully draws the believer, little by little, into deeper and deeper commitment. How does it do this? Through the combined effect of the same three factors that we previously suggested make devout religious beliefs particularly resistant to change—esteem enhancement, public commitment, and social support.

ESTEEM ENHANCEMENT

The new believer is usually told that he or she is now one of a select group of individuals who have “seen the light.” This enhances his or her self-esteem. And enhanced self-esteem can make the believer more likely to reject the arguments of anyone who questions the new belief.

Indirect evidence for this reasoning has been provided by David Glass (1964), who found that individuals who have had their self-esteem enhanced are especially likely to resort to derogation of others to reduce dissonance. Glass led individuals to believe that they had delivered shocks to an innocent victim. Participants were then given an opportunity to state their impression of the victim. Based on dissonance theory, Glass reasoned that individuals with enhanced self-esteem, those who saw themselves as good, noble people, would have more dissonance to reduce as a result of delivering shocks to the innocent victim. Although they could reduce the dissonance by re-evaluating themselves, deciding that they were not as good and noble as they had thought, Glass expected that they would instead derogate the victim. By seeing the victim as a relatively worthless individual, they could rationalize their delivery of the shocks without losing their high opinion of themselves. This is exactly what happened. Compared with low-self-esteem individuals, high-self-esteem individuals derogated the victim more.

We would suggest that a parallel process can occur as a result of the esteem enhancement derived from religious commitment. Imagine a believer motivated to retain the esteem that comes from being a person with special insight into the mysteries of life. What will be his response when people present arguments and evidence that contradict his beliefs? He knows who is right and who is wrong: he is right, and they are wrong. After all, they do not have his special insight. In this way, the esteem-enhancing nature of the beliefs may lead the believer toward relatively greater reliance on his own perceptions and derogation of the perceptions of anyone who challenges the beliefs.

PUBLIC COMMITMENT

Charles Kiesler has studied the escalating consequences of public behavioral commitment. Based on studies of social and political beliefs, both in the laboratory and the field, Kiesler (1971) reports what he calls a *boomerang effect*: If individuals are publicly committed to action consistent with their

belief, then hearing arguments that challenge the belief can intensify it. This boomerang effect is another example of belief intensification in the face of opposition. It is important to note, however, that the beliefs Kiesler studied were not nearly as personally important as are deeply held religious beliefs. Further, participants in Kiesler's research were not presented with unequivocal disconfirmation, only with forcefully stated counterarguments.

To find that opposition as well as unequivocal disconfirmation can produce belief intensification carries important implications for the emergence of devout religious beliefs, because most religious beliefs, such as a belief in God, are not stated in such a way that they can be unequivocally disconfirmed. Instead, they are subject to, and are frequently subjected to, challenges of varying intensity.

Kiesler's analysis carries another important implication concerning the consequences of public commitment over time. Imagine that an individual publicly states a tentative and moderately held belief. Imagine further that he is met with counterarguments from friends and acquaintances. What will happen? Although he may simply drop his belief, the evidence for the boomerang effect, as well as our previous argument for esteem enhancement, suggests that he will probably state his belief a bit more strongly in both word and deed. What happens then? Kiesler suggests that this public commitment to a more extreme belief has two consequences. First, it makes the believer more accepting of even more extreme related beliefs; beliefs that he initially might have considered outlandish and fanatical are now not that far removed from what he himself has proclaimed. Second, it makes him even more likely to be confronted with opposition. The more extreme his own belief, the more likely it is to meet with disagreement from others. This opposition should drive him even further toward extreme statements and acts (again, the boomerang effect), making him susceptible to influence by even more extreme related beliefs and to new, even more intense opposition. Step-by-step, public behavioral commitment to the belief, and the belief itself, both move toward extremity.

Michael Pallak and his associates have presented research that lends empirical support to several of the steps in this process of escalation due to public commitment. Sullivan and Pallak (1976; see also Pallak & Sullivan, 1979) found that once an individual had publicly stated a belief, he or she was more likely to agree to take other actions consistent with that belief. Pallak, Mueller, Dollar, and Pallak (1972) found that public, behavioral commitment to a relatively moderate stance on an issue made the person more susceptible to an extremist appeal. And Halverson and Pallak (1978) found that taking public action consistent with one's beliefs led to changes in one's cognitive structure toward greater "ego-involvement" in the belief. Ego-involvement is important, because previous research by Sherif and her associates has indicated that ego-involvement is associated with greater likelihood of taking subsequent action in line with one's belief (Sherif, Kelley, Rodgers, Sarup, & Tittler, 1973) and being more accepting of extreme statements of the belief (Sherif, Sherif, & Nubergall, 1965).

In combination, these findings seem to provide rather clear documentation of the process of belief-behavior escalation. Taking public action consistent with a belief, even a moderate and tentatively held belief, leads to greater ego-involvement in the belief, greater susceptibility to extreme statements of the belief, and greater resistance to opposition to the belief. These consequences, in turn, increase the likelihood of taking further public action and the likelihood of more opposition. Round by round, the individual is moved toward increasing ego-involvement with an increasingly extreme belief.

Religious groups seem well aware of this process of belief-behavior escalation. Typically, the new convert is asked to make some public, behavioral commitment of a relatively minor sort, to "come forward" or at least to "tell someone else." Over time, the behavioral demands are increased as the belief intensifies. Getting a believer to distribute information door-to-door, to sell flowers, or to preach on the street corner not only leads to the possibility of new converts and to increased revenues for a religious movement. It also intensifies the devotion and commitment of the believer.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

As the belief escalates and becomes more extreme, so does the believer's dependence for social support on others who share the belief. He or she is likely to become more isolated and cut off from former friends and family who do not share the belief, and this weakening of former ties is likely to be matched by an increasing dependence on the new reference group, the community of faith (Galanter, 1989; Staples & Mauss, 1987). Empirical evidence of increased dependency on those who share one's view of reality comes from an experiment by Darley, Moriarty, Darley, and Berscheid (1974).

These researchers used a research technique developed by Solomon Asch (1956) to study conformity. Groups of individuals were presented with a series of judgments on which there were clearly correct answers. Each group contained only one naive research participant; all other members were confederates of the experimenter. The naive participant always made his judgments near the end of the group, and unknown to him, the situation was set up to study the effect of the confederates' judgments on his judgments. Asch had found in such a situation that if the confederates all made a clearly incorrect choice, many participants are unable to resist this group pressure; they too make the incorrect choice. Asch also found that if just one of the confederates gives the correct response, the pressure to conform is broken; participants almost invariably make the correct response also.

Darley et al. took the analysis of the pressure to conform one step further. As a first phase of their experiment they subjected participants to a situation similar to the one used by Asch in which one of the confederates deviated from the others, always making correct responses. As Asch had

found, participants easily resisted the majority pressure and made correct responses. But Darley et al. added a second phase to their experiment. The participants were placed in a second judgment situation in which some were paired with the confederate who had previously deviated from the majority, always making correct responses, whereas others were paired with a different confederate. In the new situation the confederate made some responses that were clearly incorrect. What effect did these errors have on the judgments of research participants? Participants who were paired with the confederate who had previously been their ally in truth were far more likely to conform to his incorrect responses in this new situation. Thus, although having an ally allowed the participants to be independent and resist the pressure to conform in the larger group situation, the subsequent session revealed that they had become increasingly dependent on the opinions of the ally.

It seems likely that a similar process can occur for the member of a religious community. Knowing that there are others who think as you do may enable you to resist outside opposition, but at the same time, it may make you less able to resist opinions endorsed by the group or its leader (Galanter, 1989; Hammond & Hunter, 1984; Jacobs, 1984). Moreover, research by Dittes and Kelley (1956) suggests that pressure to conform to group opinion may be especially strong for those who (1) highly value membership in the group and (2) feel only moderately accepted as opposed to totally accepted by the group. These characteristics would seem to describe the new group member, who is acutely aware of his or her dependence on the group and also of having only marginal status within the group. Thus, there would seem to be especially strong pressures on the “novitiate” to conform to group opinion, stronger pressure than might be felt by a well-accepted long-term group member. Of course, by the time one becomes a long-term group member one has burnt many bridges to other social support systems, and even if one feels free to deviate from group opinion and still remain accepted by the group, one is not likely to do so.

In combination, the effects of esteem enhancement, public commitment, and social support seem likely to lead to a gradual escalation in the intensity of even moderate and tentative beliefs. (The importance of all three factors being present is suggested by Long & Hadden, 1983.) This escalation can produce deeply held, devout beliefs capable of maintaining their hold on the believer even in the face of unequivocal disconfirmation. Perhaps the clearest example of this escalation process is to be found in religious cults.

BELIEF ESCALATION IN ACTION: RELIGIOUS CULTS

One of the questions that we have most frequently encountered from students and friends concerning the endless procession of new total-commitment religious groups—often called *cults*—goes something like this: “How

can they believe *that . . . and with such zeal?*" The foregoing analysis of the processes that operate to increase the extremity of and behavioral commitment to a religious belief would seem to go a long way toward answering this question. It suggests that the answer need not lie in some personality defect or pathological need on the part of the person joining a cult, nor need it lie in the use of physical coercion (Richardson, 1980; Snow & Machalek, 1982). Instead, two perfectly normal needs, when operating in a particular social environment, appear quite capable of accounting for the emergence of intense allegiance to virtually any set of beliefs. The needs are (1) the need to make sense of one's life by dealing with various existential questions and (2) the need to maintain an internally consistent cognitive organization. The particular social environment is one of opposition from those outside the community of believers and support from those within. Given these environmental conditions, all that seems required for zealous allegiance is that the beliefs be capable of providing a sense of meaning in life and a sense of personal worth. Then the need for consistency takes hold. Supported by the forces of esteem enhancement, public commitment, and social support, it can propel the individual into escalating involvement with increasingly extreme beliefs.

How far can this escalation process go? Far, very far. We believe that it led to the following interchange among those who, step-by-step, had given up their time, money, possessions, and even their homeland, to live for their religious beliefs in the jungle of Guyana:

Rev. Jim Jones: To me death is not a fearful thing. It's living that's cursed. It's not worth living like this.

Cultist Christine Miller: I think that there were too few who left for 1,200 people to give their lives for those people that left.

Jones: Do you know how many left?

Miller: Oh, 20-odd. That's small compared to what's here.

Jones: 20-odd. But what's gonna happen when they don't leave? When they get on the plane and the plane goes down? That plane'll come out of the air. There's no way you fly a plane without a pilot. You think Russia's gonna want us with all this stigma? We had some value, but now we don't have any value. [Jones, who called his political philosophy "socialistic Communism," had talked of moving the community to Russia.]

Miller: Well, I don't see it like that. I mean, I feel like that as long as there's life there's hope.

Jones: Well, everybody dies. I haven't seen anybody yet didn't die. And I'd like to choose my own kind of death for a change. I'm tired of being tormented to hell. Tired of it. [Applause.]

Miller: But I look at all the babies and I think they deserve to live.

Jones: But don't they deserve much more? They deserve peace.

Miller: I think we all have a right to our own destiny as individuals. And I have a right to choose mine, and everybody else has a right to choose theirs.

Jones: The best testimony we can make is to leave this goddam world. [After applause, more argument breaks out in the crowd. Jones' voice, remarkably controlled, begins to rise.] Everybody hold it! Hold it! Hold it! Lay down your

burdens. Down by the riverside. Shall we lay them down here by the side of Guyana? When they start parachuting out of the air, they'll shoot some of our innocent babies. Can you let them take your child?

Voices: No! No! No!

Man: I'm ready to go. If you tell us we have to give our lives now, we're ready: all the rest of the sisters and brothers are with me.

Jones: I've tried to keep this thing from happening. But I now see it's the will of sovereign Being that we lay down our lives in protest against what's been done. If they come after our children, and we give them our children, then our children will suffer forever. [Cultists returning from the airstrip tell Jones that Congressman Ryan, who had been visiting the community on a fact-finding trip, has been killed.]

Jones: Please get us some medication. It's simple, there's no convulsions with it. Just, please get it. Before it's too late. The G.D.F. [Guyanese army] will be here. Get movin', get movin'. Don't be afraid to die. Are you going to separate yourself from whoever shot the Congressman? I don't know who shot him.

Voices: No! No! No!

Jones: How many are dead? [One of the airstrip party reports that others were killed.] Aw, God, Almighty God. It's too late. They're all laying out there dead. Please, can we hasten our medication?

Woman: OK. There's nothing to worry about. Everybody keep calm and try to keep your children calm. Let the little children in and reassure them. [The children are given the poison first.] They're not crying from pain; it's just a little bitter-tasting.

Jones: It's hard only at first. Living is much, much more difficult. Rising in the morning and not knowing what the night's bringing.

Woman: This is nothing to cry about. This is something we could all rejoice about. I'm looking at so many people crying. I wish you would not cry. [Applause.]

Jones: Please, for God's sake, let's get on with it. We've lived as no other people lived and loved. We've had as much of this world as you're gonna get. Let's just be done with it. I want to see you go. They can take me and do what they want, whatever they want to do. I don't want to see you go through this hell no more. No more.

Man: The way the children are laying there now, I'd rather see them lay like that than to see them have to die like the Jews did, which was pitiful. Like Dad [the cultists called Jones "Dad"] said, when they come in, they're going to massacre our children. And the ones that they take capture, they're gonna just let them grow up and be dummies. And not grow up to be a person like the one and only Jim Jones. [Applause.]

Jones: Let's get gone. Let's get gone. We tried to find a new beginning. But it's too late. I don't know who killed the Congressman. But as far as I'm concerned I killed him. He had no business coming, I told him not to come.

Lay down your life with dignity. Don't lay down with tears and agony. It's just stepping over into another plane. [Crying and screaming in the background.] Stop this hysterics. This is not the way for people who are socialistic Communists to die. Children, it's just something to put you to rest. Oh, God. [Continued crying.]

Mother, mother, please. Don't do this. Lay down your life with your

child. Free at last. Keep your emotions down. Children, it will not hurt. If you be quiet. [Music in background. Children still crying.] I don't care how many screams you hear; death is a million times preferable to spend more days in this life. If you knew what was ahead of you, you'd be glad to be stepping over tonight.

I call on you to quit exciting your children. Stop this nonsense. Hurry, my children, hurry. Quickly. Quickly. Quickly. No more pain. No more pain. All they do is take a drink to go to sleep. That's what death is, sleep. Have trust. You have to step across. This world was not our home. (Transcript of tape found in a recorder in Jonestown, Guyana; reproduced in *Time* magazine, March 26, 1979, pp. 17-19)

After all his "children" were "free at last." Jim Jones died too, presumably by his own hand. In all, 913 people died in Jonestown on that afternoon in November 1978. The very beliefs that freed them from worldly cares to live "as no other people lived and loved" compelled them to "die with dignity."

Bondage to these beliefs and to Jones's authority did not come quickly. Had Jones proposed such a course of action in the early days of the cult back in California, it would probably have been rejected. We would suggest that the bondage was reached by a long, slow process of escalating intensification of belief and behavior built on enhanced self-esteem, public commitment, and intense social support. By small steps, these devout believers reached the point of no return.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Is religion a source of personal freedom or bondage? We believe that an answer depends on how one approaches religion. To the extent that people use their religion as an extrinsic means to self-serving ends, religion is likely to be perceived as an oppressive set of prescribed beliefs and behaviors. It is restricting, a drag. But to the extent that religion is an intrinsic end in itself, it is likely to be perceived as an important source of personal freedom. It is a joy; it provides freedom from existential doubt and fear (e.g., fear of death), as well as from a variety of self-destructive behaviors (e.g., excessive drinking and lust). But the freedom obtained by devout, intrinsic belief is obtained at a price; it is freedom with bondage, bondage to the belief system itself.

Because the beliefs meet important personal needs, they are highly valued by the believer. As a result, they are highly resistant to change. The devout believer can quickly reach the point where he or she will react to well-founded counterarguments against the beliefs not by critically re-examining the beliefs but by endorsing them even more strongly. This reaction is dramatically displayed in belief intensification in the face of disconfirming information.

To understand this belief-intensification process, we turned to Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Dissonance theory predicts that intensification will occur when (1) the disconfirmed belief is deeply held; (2) the

believer has made public his or her commitment to the belief; and (3) he or she is in contact with other believers who can provide social support. Evidence from history, field observation, and quasi-experimental studies provides support for this prediction.

But why should clear disconfirmation under these conditions lead the believer to cling even more firmly to his or her belief? Dissonance theory suggests that the reason lies in the need to maintain a consistent, meaningful cognitive organization. In an attempt to maintain consistency, the believer is motivated to reduce the dissonance between the belief and the disconfirming information. And in this attempt, he or she is in a bind. On the one hand, the disconfirming information cannot be denied; on the other, the believer does not want to let go of a personally meaningful, liberating belief. As a result, rather than changing the belief, he or she attempts to drown out the dissonance in a chorus of cognitions consonant with the belief, including both reinterpretations to explain the disconfirmation in a manner consistent with the belief and more intense statements of the belief itself.

It has been suggested that such a process of intensification in the face of disconfirmation can account for the origin of major world religions such as Christianity. Whether this is so remains unclear. It is clear, however, that many religious communities create a psychological environment that encourages a step-by-step escalation toward increasing dependence on the community's beliefs, making intensification the most likely response to challenge. Important features of this environment include (1) providing the individual with a sense of special identity and esteem; (2) encouraging him or her to act publicly on the belief; and (3) providing a cohesive system of social support. We believe that the fruits of a belief nurtured in such an environment were dramatically, if tragically, displayed at Jonestown, Guyana. But we also believe that a similar escalation process is operating in a less spectacular, and less destructive, way in the lives of the devout followers of any set of religious beliefs, including major world religions.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32 NRSV). There seems to be psychological truth in this statement because there is much evidence that the truth found through devout religious belief provides important personal freedoms. But there is also much evidence that this freedom comes at the price of uncritical allegiance to the beliefs themselves. The very truth that makes you free, because it makes you free, can enslave. We began this chapter with the joyous cry of the faithful, "Free at last." We ended with this same cry, made by Jim Jones as he admonished mothers to "lay down your life with your child." Devout religious beliefs can bind one so tightly that one is "freely" compelled to die for them.

Are the personal freedoms obtained through devout religious belief worth the price? At one level this is a question that each individual must answer for him- or herself. But as psychologists, we would like to know more about the consequences of a devout intrinsic belief before coming to any conclusion. We need to know more about what such beliefs do for the individual, both in terms of personal adjustment, satisfaction, and happiness,

and in terms of ability to respond positively and openly to a wider range of people and situations. It is possible that the personal and social benefits obtained from devout belief more than justify the cost of uncritical bondage. In the next three chapters we shall consider this possibility. Chapter 8 concerns the effect of devout religious belief on personal adjustment and mental health; Chapters 9 and 10, the effect on response to others, especially the outcast, downtrodden, and the needy.

A POSTSCRIPT: FREEDOM OR BONDAGE AND THE QUEST DIMENSION

In Chapter 6 we suggested that the popular distinction between two dimensions of individual religion, as an extrinsic means to self-serving ends and as an intrinsic end in itself, needed to be amended to include a third dimension, as an open-ended quest. In this chapter we have had much to say about the freedom and bondage that result from an intrinsic, end orientation to religion. But we have said almost nothing about the quest orientation. This omission was forced on us, because there is almost no theory or research that has any clear bearing on the question of whether a quest orientation to religion is personally liberating or enslaving. This paucity of evidence makes us hesitant even to comment on the question, but we feel that something should be said. Here are some thoughts and a summary of the limited empirical evidence.

First, some thoughts. We would suggest that the quest dimension will be associated with less bondage than the intrinsic, end dimension but that it will also be associated with less freedom. Recall the dual emphasis within the quest dimension on skepticism toward traditional religious answers and critical reflection on religious questions. This emphasis suggests that the person who orients toward religion as a quest has neither the positive, affirmative answers nor the social support of a community of believers to entrap him or her into an escalating intensification of belief. Therefore, the quest dimension should not be associated with the bondage that is associated with the intrinsic, end dimension. At the same time, the lack of positive, affirmative answers makes it likely that the quest dimension will not produce the freedom associated with devout, intrinsic belief. A quest orientation does not provide the assurance of special insight into the mysteries of life and, as a result, is not likely to produce either the liberation from existential fear and doubt or the dramatic behavioral changes that the devout, intrinsic believer enjoys.

Although attempts to collect data to test this reasoning are few, results so far seem quite supportive. In one study, Batson (1980) constructed three brief scales designed to assess the degree to which individuals perceived their religion as (1) restricting their behavior; (2) freeing them from existential doubts and fears; and (3) binding them to unquestioning allegiance. Items on these Restriction, Freedom, and Bondage scales are presented in

Table 7.3. Batson administered these scales and the six scales used to measure the means, end, and quest dimensions (see Chapter 6) to eighty undergraduates (forty men, forty women) with at least a moderate interest in religion. Based on the reasoning in the preceding paragraph, he predicted that those scoring higher on the End component and related scales (Intrinsic, External, Internal, and Orthodoxy) would be less likely to perceive their religion as restricting, would be more likely to perceive it as freeing, and would be more willing to be bound by it. In contrast, those scoring higher on the Quest component and scale would not perceive their religion as either restricting or liberating, and would be less willing to be bound by it. Finally, those scoring higher on the Means component and related Extrinsic scale would perceive their religion as more restricting and as neither more freeing nor more binding.

The correlations found between the various measures of religious orientation and the Restriction, Freedom, and Bondage scales are reproduced in Table 7.4. As can be seen, they are quite consistent with the predictions. The End component and related scales were negatively correlated with the Restriction scale and positively correlated with the Freedom and Bondage scales. The Quest component and scale correlated significantly only with the

Table 7.3. Items on Batson's (1980) Religious Restriction, Freedom, and Bondage scales

Restriction scale

1. To me, religion comes across as an endless string of rules and prohibitions.
2. If I really lived the way my religious beliefs say I should, I would have to give up a lot that is important to me.
3. (–) I do not find that my religious beliefs have forced me to give up anything really important.
4. I often experience conflict between what my religious beliefs say I should do and what I want to do.
5. Religion often seems like a "drag" to me.

Freedom scale

1. My religious beliefs provide me with meaning and purpose for my life.
2. My religion frees me from doubts and uncertainties about myself.
3. Because of my religious beliefs I do not worry about money and success the way many other people do.
4. My religious beliefs give me strength to resist the temptation to do wrong.
5. Because of my religious beliefs I do not fear death.

Bondage scale

1. (–) I want to avoid becoming too strongly committed to any one set of religious beliefs.
 2. It is not, nor should it be, within my power to change my religious beliefs.
 3. I would rather risk being accused of being a fanatic than to be wishy-washy in my religious beliefs.
 4. I do not think anything could make me change my present religious beliefs.
 5. I would feel totally lost without my present religious beliefs.
 6. (–) I think it is important not to get locked into any one set of religious beliefs.
-

Note: Items preceded by a minus sign are reversed in scoring.

Table 7.4 Correlations between measures of religious orientation and the Religious Restriction, Freedom, and Bondage scales ($N = 80$)

Measures of religious orientation	Restriction scale	Freedom scale	Bondage scale
Religious orientation scales			
Extrinsic	.30**	-.02	-.07
Intrinsic	-.17	.65***	.48***
External	-.10	.44***	.47***
Internal	-.37***	.61***	.58***
Quest	.21	.05	-.28*
Orthodoxy	-.23*	.47***	.47***
Religion orientation components			
Religion as Means	.26*	.00	.04
Religion as End	-.28*	.66***	.63***
Religion as Quest	.18	.05	-.30**

Source: Adapted from Batson (1980).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $P < .001$, two-tailed.

Bondage scale, and these correlations were negative. Finally, the Means component and related Extrinsic scale correlated significantly only with the Restriction scale, and these correlations were positive.

To summarize the implications of these correlations, they suggest, first of all, that the extrinsic, means dimension is associated with a view of religion as personally restricting rather than liberating. Second, the intrinsic, end dimension is associated with a view of religion as personally freeing and not restricting. At the same time, this dimension is associated with a readiness to bind oneself to one's religion. And finally, the quest dimension is associated with neither a clear view of religion as restricting nor freeing, only with a reduced readiness to bind oneself to one's present religious beliefs. This rather complex pattern of relationships is entirely consistent with our suggestion that a quest orientation is at once less binding and less freeing than an intrinsic, end orientation.

A second study (Batson et al., 1980) also provided some data consistent with this suggestion. In this study, thirty-six male and thirty-six female undergraduates who had previously completed the six scales used to measure the means, end, and quest dimensions were given a chance to indicate their desire to listen to a number of short audiotapes concerning religion. One of the tapes was described as "a forceful argument that your religious beliefs, or lack of beliefs, are determined by your social environment." It was noted that this tape was very controversial and had "led a number of students to reject their beliefs about religion." As expected, higher scores on the End component and related scales correlated negatively with expressed preference for hearing this belief-challenging tape, presumably because higher scorers felt more dependent on their beliefs and feared having them challenged. But higher scores on the Quest component and scale correlated positively with preference for hearing this tape. Correlations for

the Means component and related Extrinsic scale were not reliably different from zero.

Results of the recent study by McFarland and Warren (1992), in which devoutly religious individuals were asked to indicate how much they wished to read belief-supporting and belief-challenging articles, paralleled and extended results of the previous study. Whereas both the Intrinsic and Quest scales were significantly ($p < .05$) positively correlated with desire to read the belief-supporting articles, only the Quest scale was significantly positively correlated with desire to read the belief-challenging articles. The extrinsic scale was significantly negatively correlated with desire to read the belief-supporting articles.

The results of these three studies, although far from conclusive, are quite consistent with the suggestion that a quest orientation to religion is less enslaving but also less freeing than an intrinsic, end orientation. Assuming that future research also supports this suggestion, should we conclude that the quest dimension is more psychologically adaptive than the intrinsic, end dimension because it does not involve enslavement to one's religious beliefs? No. Instead, we should recognize that the quest dimension confronts us with the flip side of the question raised earlier concerning the psychological consequences of the intrinsic, end dimension. It leads us to ask: Is the benefit of avoiding allegiance to a set of beliefs worth the cost of not being freed from existential fear and doubt? As with the earlier question of whether the freedom from fear and doubt obtained by intrinsic belief is worth the cost of enslaving allegiance, we must withhold an answer to this question until we have had a chance in Chapters 8, 9, and 10, to look at the personal and social benefits associated with the quest dimension.