

Executive Summary Backgrounder

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Why Religion Matters Even More: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability

Patrick F. Fagan

Over the past decade, considerable research has emerged that demonstrates the benefits of religious practice within society. Religious practice promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and the community.

Of particular note are the studies that indicate the benefits of religion to the poor. Regular attendance at religious services is linked to healthy, stable family life, strong marriages, and well-behaved children. The practice of religion also leads to a reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse, crime, substance abuse, and addiction. In addition, religious practice leads to an increase in physical and mental health, longevity, and education attainment. Moreover, these effects are intergenerational, as grandparents and parents pass on the benefits to the next generations.

America's Founding Fathers understood the vital role that religion plays in a free society. Far from shielding the American people from religious influence, the Founders promoted the freedom of religion and praised the benefits that it brings to society.

What Policymakers Should Do

The original intent of the Founders was not to bar religion from the public arena, but to guard against the federal government's establishment of a particular state-approved church. At the federal, state, and local levels, policymakers should work to encourage an environment in which religious insti-

tutions and organizations can thrive and citizens can actively practice their faith—both privately and publicly. In doing so, government entities can remain neutral with regard to particular faiths while still respecting the rights of citizens who are not affiliated with any religion or faith.

Specifically, Congress should:

- **Pass a sense of the Congress resolution finding that data on religious practice are useful to policymakers and researchers who inform the public debate.** Such a resolution would remove the misconception that legislators are not permitted to be concerned with the religious dimension of life.
- **Ensure the collection of better information from existing periodic national surveys on the prevalence of religious practice and the association between religion and societal well-being.** For instance, the American Community Survey and the Census Bureau's March Supplement to the Current Population Survey should be augmented to include a measure of the level of respondents' religious practice. This would permit an analysis of the effect of religious prac-

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tice on the myriad aspects of national life that are studied.

In general, policymakers also should:

- **Become acquainted with research showing that religious practice serves the common good.** This should inform their policy decision-making and equip them to lead an ongoing national discussion on the vital and constructive role of religion in American life. The purpose of this dialogue would not be to enact legislation, but to highlight through public discourse the association between religious belief and practice and the well-being of American society. Such discussions would promote understanding, appreciation, and cooperation among citizens of different faiths while simultaneously respecting the freedom of those who do not have a religious affiliation or an inclination to practice any religion.
- **Consider the evidence on the effectiveness of faith-based approaches to social problems.** Faith-based social service ministries have unique competencies in addressing some of the most difficult social problems. By some estimates, these organizations provide \$20 billion worth of privately funded social service delivery for more than 70 million Americans each year. There are significant indications that faith-based social service programs are more effective than their secular counterparts.

Conclusion

A steadily growing body of evidence from the social sciences demonstrates that regular religious practice benefits individuals, families, and communities, and thus the nation as a whole. The practice of religion improves health, academic achievement, and economic well-being and fosters self-control, self-esteem, empathy, and compassion.

Religious belief and practice can address many of the nation's most pressing social problems, some of which have reached serious levels (e.g., out-of-

wedlock births and family dissolution). Research has linked the practice of religion to reductions in the incidence of divorce, crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, out-of-wedlock births, health problems, anxiety, and prejudice. Faith-based outreach has been uniquely effective in drug addiction rehabilitation and societal re-entry programs for prisoners. Furthermore, the effects of religious belief and practice are intergenerational and cumulative. In a sense, they “compound the interest” of our social capital.

Freedom from an established religion is compatible with the freedom to fully practice one's religious beliefs. This freedom is very different from purported protection *from* religious influence. To work to reduce the influence of religious belief or practice is to further the disintegration of society. Some may be uncomfortable with the religious beliefs and practices of others, but that discomfort is small compared to the effects of having a society with little or no religious practice. America's ongoing national experiment with freedom now faces anew the challenge of balancing society's need for the benefits that religion brings, its commitment to religious pluralism in the political order, and the rights of those who choose to live with no religious conviction.

Our Founding Fathers, in their dedication to liberty, promoted the freedom of all Americans to practice religious beliefs, or not, as they choose. Although the freedom not to practice religion is intrinsic to religious freedom, that protection does not mean that this non-practice of religion is equally beneficial to society. Social science data reinforce George Washington's declaration in his farewell address: “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports.”

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Background

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Why Religion Matters Even More: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability

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Over the past decade, considerable research has emerged that demonstrates the benefits of religious practice within society.¹ Religious practice promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and the community.

Of particular note are the studies that indicate the benefits of religion to the poor.² Regular attendance at religious services is linked to healthy, stable family life, strong marriages, and well-behaved children. The practice of religion also leads to a reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse, crime, substance abuse, and addiction. In addition, religious practice leads to an increase in physical and mental health, longevity, and education attainment. Moreover, these effects are intergenerational, as grandparents and parents pass on the benefits to the next generations.

America's Founding Fathers understood the vital role that religion plays in a free society.³ Far from shielding the American people from religious influence, the Founders promoted the freedom of religion and praised the benefits that it brings to society. George Washington articulated this in his farewell address to the nation:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could

Talking Points

- Religious practice substantially benefits all aspects of life, especially family life. Marriages are happier, and parent-child relationships are stronger, while domestic violence, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, and extramarital sex are all reduced.
- Students who regularly attend religious services enjoy significant gains in education, especially low-income students. Religious practice encourages good work habits and higher aspirations in children as well as increased parental involvement.
- Religious practice is associated with improved overall health. Individuals who regularly attend religious services live longer and experience lower levels of infectious diseases. Mental health and happiness, self-esteem, self-control, and coping skills are increased, while recovery from addictions is greatly enhanced and frequency of depression and suicide are reduced.
- Communities with high levels of religious practice experience greater levels of cohesion, high levels of charitable giving, and less violent crime.

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not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.⁴

Given the extent to which religious practice promotes civil society, understanding religion's contribution to America's constitutional order is fundamental to the nation's continued prosperity. The practice of religion is a powerful antidote to many of our nation's pressing social problems, many of which have reached historically high proportions. Yet, despite the societal benefits of religion, the expression of faith in the public square has faced many challenges. Therefore, legislators should seek constitutionally appropriate ways to explore the impact of religious practice on society and, where appropriate, recognize its role and importance.

Religion and Marriage

There are many indications that the combination of religious practice and stable marital relationships contributes to a strong and successful next generation. We already know that stable marriage is associated with improved physical, intellectual, mental, and emotional health of men, women, and children, as well as equipping them with the values and habits that promote prosperous economic activity.⁵ Religious practice is also related to positive outcomes for the stability and quality of marriage.

Marriage. Numerous sociological studies have shown that valuing religion and regularly practicing it are associated with greater marital stability, higher levels of marital satisfaction, and an increased likelihood that an individual will be inclined to marry.⁶ Christopher Ellison of the University of Texas at Austin and his colleagues found that couples who acknowledged a divine purpose in their marriage were more likely to collaborate, to have greater marital adjustment, and to perceive more benefits from marriage and were less likely to use aggression or to come to a stalemate in their disagreements.⁷ Earlier research found that couples whose marriages lasted 30 years or more reported that their faith helped them to deal with difficult times, was a source of moral guidance in making decisions and dealing

1. This paper is an update of Patrick F. Fagan, "Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1064, January 15, 1996, at www.heritage.org/research/religion/bg1064.cfm. See also Bill Broadway, "The Social Blessings of Believing: Heritage Foundation Report Urges Policymakers to Explore the Practical Benefits of Religious Practice," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 1996, p. B7.
2. See Diane R. Brown and Lawrence E. Gary, "Religious Socialization and Educational Attainment Among African Americans: An Empirical Assessment," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 411–426; Sung Joon Jang and Byron R. Johnson, "Neighborhood Disorder, Individual Religiosity, and Adolescent Use of Illicit Drugs: A Test of Multilevel Hypotheses," *Criminology*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (February 2001), pp. 109–144; and Byron R. Johnson and David B. Larson, "Religion: The Forgotten Factor in Cutting Youth Crime and Saving At-Risk Urban Youth," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Center for Civic Innovation *Jeremiah Project Report* No. 2, 1998, at www.manhattan-institute.org/html/jpr-98-2.htm (December 6, 2006).
3. For a review of the evidence on this topic, see Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001).
4. James D. Richardson, *Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1897* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907), Vol. 1, p. 213.
5. See Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: Free Press, 1960); and David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
6. Andrew J. Weaver, Judith A. Samford, Virginia J. Morgan, David B. Larson, Harold G. Koenig, and Kevin J. Flannelly, "A Systematic Review of Research on Religion in Six Primary Marriage and Family Journals: 1995–1999," *American Journal of Family Therapy*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (July 2002), pp. 293–309.

with conflict, and encouraged them to maintain their commitment to their marriages.⁸

Divorce. Four of every 10 children experience parental divorce,⁹ but a link between religious practice and a decreased likelihood of divorce has been established in numerous studies. Women who are more religious are less likely to experience divorce or separation than their less religious peers.¹⁰ Marriages in which both spouses attend religious services frequently are 2.4 times less likely to end in divorce than marriages in which neither spouse worships.¹¹ Those who view their religious beliefs as “very important” are 22 percent less likely to divorce than those for whom religious beliefs are only “somewhat important.”¹² The sociological literature reviews by the late David Larson of the Duke University Medical School and his colleagues indicated that religious attendance is the most important predictor of marital stability,¹³ confirming studies conducted as far back as 50 years ago.¹⁴

The likelihood of divorce is even further reduced when husbands and wives share the same religious commitment. Such couples report having a greater sense of well-being and more satisfaction with their marital relationship,¹⁵ and they are less likely to commit acts of domestic violence.¹⁶ A study of couples with divergent theological views showed that they were more likely to argue, especially about financial matters.¹⁷ Intermarriage across major faith groups is also linked with greater marital instability.¹⁸ Furthermore, couples who share the same faith are more likely to reunite if they separate than are couples who do not share the same religious affiliation. In one study, one-third of the separated spouses who had the same religious affiliation reconciled, compared with less than one-fifth of those with different affiliations.¹⁹

During the 1980s and 1990s, when religious practice decreased overall,²⁰ the association between regular religious attendance and marital stability became even more apparent. Those who had ceased

7. Christopher G. Ellison and Kristin L. Anderson, “Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 40, Issue 2 (June 2001), pp. 269–286.
8. Linda C. Robinson, “Marital Strengths in Enduring Marriages,” *Family Relations*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1993), pp. 38–45.
9. Jane Reardon-Anderson, Matthew Stagner, Jennifer Ehrle Macomber, and Julie Murray, “Systematic Review of the Impact of Marriage and Relationship Programs,” Urban Institute, February 11, 2005, at www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411142_impact_marriage.pdf (December 6, 2006).
10. Karen Price Carver, “Female Employment and First Union Dissolution in Puerto Rico,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (1993), pp. 686–698.
11. Vaughn R. A. Call and Tim B. Heaton, “Religious Influence on Marital Stability,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (September 1997), pp. 382–392.
12. Chris Knoester and Alan Booth, “Barriers to Divorce: When Are They Effective? When Are They Not?” *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 2000), pp. 78–99.
13. David B. Larson, Susan S. Larson, and John Gartner, “Families, Relationships and Health,” in Danny Wedding, ed., *Behavior and Medicine* (St. Louis: Mosby Year Book, Inc., 1990), pp. 135–147.
14. Lee G. Burchinal, “Marital Satisfaction and Religious Behavior,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (June 1957), pp. 306–310.
15. Lisa D. Pearce and Dana L. Haynie, “Intergenerational Religious Dynamics and Adolescent Delinquency,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (June 2004), pp. 1553–1572.
16. Christopher G. Ellison, John P. Bartkowski, and Kristin L. Anderson, “Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?” *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 87–113.
17. Kristen Taylor Curtis and Christopher G. Ellison, “Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict: Findings from the National Survey of Families and Households,” *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (May 2002), pp. 551–576.
18. Evelyn L. Lehrer and Carmel U. Chiswick, “Religion as a Determinant of Marital Stability,” *Demography*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 385–404.
19. Howard Wineberg, “Marital Reconciliation in the United States: Which Couples Are Successful?” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (February 1994), pp. 80–88.

religious practice divorced 2.5 times more frequently than those who continued to attend religious services.²¹ Paul Amato, a leading authority on the sociology of divorce from Pennsylvania State University, concluded that a possible increase in religious practice among some already existing marriages might have offset the negative effects of the overall decrease in religious practice among many other Americans. The rise in religious practice in this newly worshipping sector between 1980 and 2000 brought about increased support for lifelong marriage and counterbalanced, at the national aggregate level, two other trends: the increased incidence of premarital cohabitation and the increased work hours of married women, both of which are associated with decreased marital satisfaction and a greater likelihood of divorce. Amato concluded that this increase in religious worship in one subgroup was one of the main factors in preventing growth in overall levels of marital unhappiness and proneness to divorce. As a result, the divorce rate in 2000 was nearly identical to the rate in 1980.²²

Marital Harmony and Satisfaction. The practice of religion not only stabilizes marriage, but also improves its quality. Brad Wilcox of the University of Virginia found that the more frequently husbands attended religious services, the happier their wives said they were with the level of affection and understanding that they received and the amount of time

that their husbands spent with them.²³ Earlier research had shown that the more frequently couples engage in religious practice, the more they were satisfied with their marriages: 60 percent who attended religious services at least monthly perceived their marriages as “very satisfactory,” compared with only 43 percent of those who attended religious services less often.²⁴ A 1977 study indicated a link between religious practice and marital sexuality: Very religious women had greater satisfaction in sexual intercourse with their husbands than did moderately religious or non-religious women.²⁵

Cohabitation. Studies consistently suggest that cohabitation is associated with an increased likelihood of divorce. For example, Paul Amato, confirming earlier indications,²⁶ reported that couples who had lived together before marriage were 59 percent more likely to divorce than those who did not.²⁷

Repeated studies confirm the finding that those who attended religious services infrequently and those who, as adolescents, considered religion to be of low importance are more likely to cohabit as young adults.²⁸ Compared with peers who attended religious services several times a week, young women who never attended were seven times more likely to cohabit. Women who attended weekly were one-third less likely to cohabit than those who attended less than once a month.²⁹

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20. Michael Hout, “Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 165–190.
21. Timothy T. Clydesdale, “Family Behaviors Among Early U.S. Baby Boomers: Exploring the Effects of Religion and Income Change, 1965–1982,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (December 1997), pp. 605–635.
22. Paul R. Amato, David R. Johnson, Alan Booth, and Stacy J. Rogers, “Continuity and Change in Marital Quality Between 1980 and 2000,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 65, No.1 (February 2003), pp. 1–22.
23. W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 186.
24. Howard M. Bahr and Bruce A. Chadwick, “Religion and Family in Middleton, USA,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 47 (May 1985), pp. 407–414.
25. Carol Tavris and Susan Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).
26. Larry L. Bumpass, James A. Sweet, and Andrew Cherlin, “The Role of Cohabitation in Declining Rates of Marriage,” University of Wisconsin, Center for Demography and Ecology *National Survey of Families and Households Working Paper No. 5*, 1989, pp. 913–927.
27. Paul R. Amato, “Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (August 1996), pp. 628–640.
28. Kazuo Yamaguchi, “Dynamic Relationships Between Premarital Cohabitation and Illicit Drug Use: An Event-History Analysis of Role Selection and Role Socialization,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (August 1985), pp. 530–546.

The religious practice of parents also affects cohabitation rates. Those whose mothers frequently attended religious services were 50 percent less likely to cohabit than were peers whose mothers were not actively religious. A related research finding reported that church-going adults tend to stop regular religious practice when they begin to cohabit.³⁰

Religion and Family Relations

In general, religious participation appears to foster an authoritative, warm, active, and expressive style of parenting. In addition, parents who attend religious services are more likely to enjoy a better relationship with their children³¹ and are more likely to be involved with their children's education.³² Moreover, the greater a child's religious involvement, the more likely both the child and parent will agree about the quality of their relationship,³³ the more similar their values will be, and the greater their emotional closeness will be.³⁴ However, some of the same research also shows that religious differences within families can detract from the parent-child relationship.

Mother-Child Relationship. Compared with mothers who did not consider religion important, those who deemed religion to be very important rated their relationship with their child significantly higher, according to a 1999 study. When mothers and their children share the same level of religious practice, they experience better relationships with one another. For instance, when 18-year-olds attended religious services with approxi-

mately the same frequency as their mothers, the mothers reported significantly better relationships with them, even many years later, indicating that the effects of similar religious practice endures. Moreover, mothers who became more religious throughout the first 18 years of their child's life reported a better relationship with that child, regardless of the level of their religious practice before the child was born. Mothers who attended religious services less often over time reported a lower-quality relationship with their adult child.³⁵

Grandmothers' religious practice illustrates an intergenerational influence. The more religious a mother's mother is, the more likely the mother has a good relationship with her own child.³⁶

Father-Child Relationship. Greater religious practice of fathers is associated with better relationships with their children, higher expectations for good relationships in the future, a greater investment in their relationships with their children, a greater sense of obligation to stay in regular contact with their children, and a greater likelihood of supporting their children and grandchildren.³⁷

Wilcox found that fathers' religious affiliations and religious attendance were positively associated with their involvement in activities with their children, such as one-on-one interaction, having dinner with their families, and volunteering for youth-related activities. Compared with fathers who had no religious affiliation, those who attended religious services frequently were more likely to monitor their children, praise and hug their children,

29. Arland Thornton, W. G. Axinn, and D. H. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (November 1992), pp. 628-651.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Lisa D. Pearce and William G. Axinn, "The Impact of Family Religious Life on the Quality of Mother-Child Relations," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (December 1998), pp. 810-828.

32. W. Bradford Wilcox, "Religion, Convention, and Paternal Involvement," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (August 2002), pp. 780-792.

33. William S. Aquilino, "Two Views of One Relationship: Comparing Parents' and Young Adult Children's Reports of the Quality of Intergenerational Relations," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (November 1999), pp. 858-870.

34. Pearce and Haynie, "Intergenerational Religious Dynamics and Adolescent Delinquency."

35. Pearce and Axinn, "The Impact of Family Religious Life on the Quality of Mother-Child Relations."

36. *Ibid.*

37. Valerie King, "The Influence of Religion on Fathers' Relationships with Their Children," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (May 2003), pp. 382-395.

and spend time with their children. In fact, fathers' frequency of religious attendance was a stronger predictor of paternal involvement in one-on-one activities with children than were employment and income—the factors most frequently cited in the academic literature on fatherhood.³⁸

Wilcox also traced the “pathways” through which religion affects fathers' relationships with their children and concluded that religious affiliation and especially religious attendance have unique effects that are independent of conventional habits of civic engagement. The emphasis that religion typically places on family life, along with churches' family-focused social networks of support and psychological support of fatherhood, helps to explain why religiously active fathers are more involved in youth-related activities.³⁹

Domestic Violence. A small but growing body of research has focused on the links between religious practice and decreased family violence. For example, men who attended religious services at least weekly were more than 50 percent less likely to commit an act of violence against their partners than were peers who attended only once a year or less.⁴⁰ No matter how the data were analyzed, regular attendance at religious services had a strong and statistically significant inverse association with the incidence of domestic abuse.⁴¹ Similarly, after controlling for all other factors, Wilcox found that of all groups studied (unaffiliated, active conservative Protestant, active mainline Protestant, nominal conservative Protestant, and nominal mainline Protestants), religiously

active conservative Protestant men were least likely to engage in domestic violence.⁴²

Religion and Extramarital Sex

Religious belief and practice are associated with less permissive attitudes toward extramarital sex and correspondingly lower rates of non-marital sexual activity among adolescents and adults.

Attitudes Regarding Non-Marital Sex. Numerous recent studies have found a relationship between religious practice and less permissive attitudes toward non-marital sex. Lisa Wade of the University of Wisconsin⁴³ and Sharon Rostosky of the University of Kentucky⁴⁴ reported that religious influence was the strongest significant predictor of less permissive sexual attitudes for both men and women. Wilcox found that, among both conservative and mainline Protestants, religious affiliation and religious attendance consistently predicted negative attitudes toward divorce and premarital sex.⁴⁵ A study of trends in the Netherlands covering a 30-year period also found that individuals who attended religious services more often were less likely to be accepting of extramarital sexual relationships.⁴⁶

These recent findings support and expand upon earlier research, such as a 1989 study of adolescents that found that youth who attended religious services more frequently had less permissive attitudes toward sexual activity and less sexual experience than peers who attended religious services less frequently.⁴⁷

38. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs*, pp. 112–118.

39. Wilcox, “Religion, Convention, and Paternal Involvement.”

40. Ellison *et al.*, “Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?”

41. Ellison and Anderson, “Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples.”

42. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs*, p. 182.

43. Lisa D. Wade, “Relationship Dissolution as a Life Stage Transition: Effects on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (November 2002), pp. 898–914.

44. Sharon Scales Rostosky, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret Laurie Comer Wright, “Coital Debut: The Role of Religiosity and Sex Attitudes in the Add Health Survey,” *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 358–367.

45. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs*, p. 81.

46. Gerbert Kraaykamp, “Trends and Countertrends in Sexual Permissiveness: Three Decades of Attitude Change in the Netherlands: 1965–1995,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (February 2002), pp. 225–239.

47. Arland Thornton, “Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (August 1989), pp. 641–653.

Adolescent Sexual Behavior. Religious practice and placing a high significance on religion are associated with decreased non-marital sexual activity. After parental marriage, religious practice is probably the most significant factor related to reduced teen sexual activity. Analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health found that a one-unit increase in religiosity⁴⁸ reduced the odds of becoming sexually active by 16 percent for girls and by 12 percent for boys.⁴⁹ Another study found that traditional values and religious beliefs were among the most common factors cited by teens as their reason for remaining sexually abstinent, second only to fear (e.g., fear of an unwanted pregnancy, a sexually transmitted disease, or parental discipline).⁵⁰ The level of overall religious practice in a community also influences the sexual behavior of its youth: The greater the level of religious practice, the lower the level of teen sexual activity.⁵¹

In a 2002 review of the academic literature on the effects of religion, 97 percent of the studies reported significant correlations between increased religious involvement and a lower likelihood of promiscuous sexual behaviors. The authors found that individuals with higher levels of religious com-

mitment and those who regularly attended religious services were generally much less likely to engage in premarital sex or extramarital affairs or to have multiple sexual partners.⁵²

Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing. Thirty-seven percent of births now occur out of wedlock,⁵³ with an increasing number born to cohabiting parents.⁵⁴ However, given the findings on the relationship between religious practice and non-marital sex, attitudes, and behavior, it is not surprising that regular religious practice is one of the most powerful factors in preventing out-of-wedlock births. Rates of such births are markedly higher among young women who do not have a religious affiliation than among peers who do.

The level of young women's religious commitment also makes a significant difference. Compared with those who viewed themselves as being "very religious," those who were "not at all religious" were far more likely to bear a child out of wedlock (among whites, three times as likely; among Hispanics, 2.5 times as likely; and among blacks, twice as likely).⁵⁵ At the state aggregate level, the same phenomenon occurs. States with higher rates of religious attendance have lower rates of teenage pregnancy.⁵⁶

48. In this study, "religiosity" scores were measured on a scale that ranged from 3 to 12 and represented an average of an individual's scores with regard to three different variables: attendance at religious services, participation in religious youth activities, and self-rated importance of religion.

49. Rostosky *et al.*, "Coital Debut."

50. Lynn Blinn-Pike, "Why Abstinent Adolescents Report They Have Not Had Sex: Understanding Sexually Resilient Youth," *Family Relations*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 1999), pp. 295-301.

51. John O. G. Billy, "Contextual Effects on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Women," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1994), pp. 387-404.

52. Byron R. Johnson, Ralph Brett Tompkins, and Derek Webb, "Objective Hope—Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations: A Systematic Review of the Literature," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2002, at www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/crrucs_objective_hope.pdf (June 30, 2005).

53. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "Births: Preliminary Data for 2005," reviewed November 21, 2006, at www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/prelimbirths05/prelimbirths05.htm#ref01 (December 13, 2006).

54. Maureen Waller, "High Hopes: Unmarried Parents' Expectations About Marriage," *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (December 2001), pp. 457-484.

55. Allan F. Abrahamse, *Beyond Stereotypes: Who Becomes a Single Teenage Mother?* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1988), pp. 37-50.

56. Michael J. Donahue, "Aggregate Religiousness and Teenage Fertility Revisited: Reanalyses of Data from the Guttmacher Institute," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Chicago, October 30, 1988.

Religion and the Abuse of Alcohol and Drugs

Numerous studies demonstrate a significant association between religious practice and healthy behavioral habits relating to cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs. Individuals with higher levels of religious involvement have lower rates of abuse and addiction and are more likely to find long-lasting success if they ever struggled with any of these behaviors.

Cigarette Use. Harold Koenig and colleagues at Duke University found that religious activity was inversely related to cigarette consumption among the elderly.⁵⁷ The late Feroz Ahmed and colleagues at Howard University found the same for African-American women of childbearing age.⁵⁸

Alcohol Abuse. Decades of research indicate that a higher level of religious involvement is associated with a reduced likelihood of abusing alcohol⁵⁹ or drugs.⁶⁰ The relationship between religious practice and the avoidance or moderate use of alcohol is well documented, whether or not denominational tenets specifically prohibit the use of alcohol.⁶¹

Adolescents,⁶² psychiatric patients,⁶³ and recovering addicts⁶⁴ all show lower rates of alcohol abuse

the more frequently they engage in religious activities. For adolescents, higher levels of religious practice by their mothers are related to significantly lower rates of alcohol abuse, even after controlling for religious denomination and the adolescents' peer associations—two factors that also influence the level of drinking.⁶⁵

Drug Abuse. Just as with alcohol, religious practice has for some time predicted significant reduction of substance abuse.⁶⁶ In a comprehensive review of the academic literature on religion and substance abuse, Byron Johnson of Baylor University and his colleagues reported that, in the vast majority of studies, participation in religious activities was associated with less drug abuse. Even in cases in which individuals used drugs, the more religious were less likely to develop long-term problems.⁶⁷ All of the factors related to a decrease in drug use—good family relations, doing well in school, having friends who do not use drugs, and having anti-drug attitudes—had an even more powerful deterrent effect when teenagers were also religious.⁶⁸ The more dangerous the drug, the more religious practice deterred its use.⁶⁹

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57. Harold G. Koenig, Linda K. George, Harvey J. Cohen, Judith C. Hays, David B. Larson, and Dan G. Blazer, "The Relationship Between Religious Activities and Cigarette Smoking in Older Adults," *Journals of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, Vol. 53A, Issue 6 (November 1998), pp. M426–M434.
58. Feroz Ahmed, Diane R. Brown, Lawrence E. Gary, and Frough Saadatmand, "Religious Predictors of Cigarette Smoking: Findings for African American Women of Childbearing Age," *Behavioral Medicine*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 34–43.
59. John Gartner, David B. Larson, and George Allen, "Religious Commitment and Mental Health: A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 19, Issue 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 6–25.
60. Deborah Hasin, Jean Endicott, and Collins Lewis, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Patients with Affective Syndrome," *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol. 26, Issue 3 (May–June 1985), pp. 283–295.
61. Achaempong Y. Amoateng and Stephen J. Bahr, "Religion, Family, and Drug Abuse," *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 29 (1986), pp. 53–73, and John K. Cochran, Leonard Beghley, and E. Wilbur Block, "Religiosity and Alcohol Behavior: An Exploration of Reference Group Therapy," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 256–276.
62. Marvin D. Free, Jr., "Religiosity, Religious Conservatism, Bonds to School, and Juvenile Delinquency Among Three Categories of Drug Users," *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1994), pp. 151–170.
63. David A. Brizer, "Religiosity and Drug Abuse Among Psychiatric Inpatients," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 337–345.
64. Stephanie Carroll, "Spirituality and Purpose in Life in Alcoholism Recovery," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (May 1993), pp. 297–301.
65. Vangie A. Foshee and Bryan R. Hollinger, "Maternal Religiosity, Adolescent Social Bonding, and Adolescent Alcohol Use," *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (November 1996), pp. 451–468.
66. Barbara R. Lorch and Robert H. Hughes, "Religion and Youth Substance Use," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 1985), pp. 197–208.
67. Johnson *et al.*, "Objective Hope."

Just as religious practice and belief deter drug abuse, religion also has a positive effect in the treatment of drug addiction. In 1994, a seven-year follow-up study of Teen Challenge, a faith-based drug addiction program, found that the program's graduates had significantly changed their behavior, in contrast to those who had dropped out.⁷⁰ A Northwestern University study⁷¹ also found that Teen Challenge participants were more likely to remain sober and to maintain employment than were peers in control groups.⁷²

Religion and Mental Health

In a review of mental health research that referenced decades of social science studies, 81 percent of the 99 studies reviewed found "some positive association...between religious involvement and greater happiness, life satisfaction, morale, positive affect, or some other measure of well-being." This analysis included a wide diversity among ages, races, and denominations.⁷³

Happiness and Well-Being. Happy people tend to be productive and law-abiding and also tend to

learn well, thus having a positive impact on society. A review of the research shows that religion significantly affects the level of an individual's happiness and overall sense of well-being. In the vast majority of the studies reviewed, an increase in religious practice was associated with having greater hope and a greater sense of purpose in life.⁷⁴

Stress, Self-Esteem, and Coping Skills. More frequent attendance at religious services predicts less distress, even when controlling for the normal socio-demographic predictors of this condition.⁷⁵ Similar findings hold for high-school students.⁷⁶ For adults, a strong belief in eternal life also predicts less harmful stress from work-related problems.⁷⁷ A survey of African-American men and women found that respondents who were more religious reported a greater sense of control than less religious respondents. This greater sense of control was, in turn, correlated with decreased distress.⁷⁸

Of the studies cited in Byron Johnson's extensive literature review, 65 percent concluded that religious commitment and practice lead to increased self-esteem, while more than 80 percent indicated

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68. Byron R. Johnson, "A Better Kind of High: How Religious Commitment Reduces Drug Use Among Poor Urban Teens," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society *Report No. 2000-2*, at www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_12.htm (December 6, 2006).
69. Edward M. Adlaf, "Drug Use and Religious Affiliation: Feelings and Behavior," *British Journal of Addiction*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (June 1985), pp. 163-171.
70. Roger D. Thompson, "Teen Challenge of Chattanooga, Tennessee: Survey of Alumni," University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 1994.
71. Aaron T. Bicknese, "The Teen Challenge Drug Treatment Program in Comparative Perspective," doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1999.
72. A recent review of the sociological literature on drug treatment and rehabilitation by Byron Johnson, now at Baylor University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, gives cause for both optimism and caution: "Our review of the literature on faith-based [interventions] reveals two very basic facts. First, what we do know about their effectiveness is positive and encouraging. Faith-based organizations appear to have advantages over comparable secular institutions in helping individuals overcome difficult circumstances (e.g., imprisonment and drug abuse). Second, although this literature is positive, it is also limited." Johnson *et al.*, "Objective Hope."
73. Johnson *et al.*, "Objective Hope."
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*
76. Ellison *et al.*, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" and J. M. Mosher and P. J. Handal, "The Relationship Between Religion and Psychological Distress in Adolescents," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 25, Issue 4 (Winter 1997), pp. 449-457.
77. Christopher G. Ellison, Jason D. Boardman, David R. Williams, and James S. Jackson, "Religious Involvement, Stress, and Mental Health: Findings from the 1995 Detroit Area Study," *Social Forces*, Vol. 80, Issue 1 (September 2001), pp. 215-249.
78. Sung Joon Jang and Byron R. Johnson, "Explaining Religious Effects on Distress Among African Americans," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (June 2004), pp. 239-260.

that religious practice correlates with increased social support.⁷⁹

Membership in a religious community can enhance coping skills. One study found that people were much more inclined to use positive coping responses when they received spiritual support from fellow church members.⁸⁰ When like-minded individuals and families joined together in prayer, mutual support, or religious practice, they viewed their circumstances with spiritual significance: not only mundane daily affairs, but also major life traumas.⁸¹ In a study of high-school students from West Virginia, the “ego strengths of hope, will, purpose, fidelity, love, and care” increased as the students lived out their religious beliefs more intently.⁸²

Thus, involvement in religious practice, religious organizations, and religious communities tends to lead to favorable self-image and to foster the development of faith, hope, benevolence, and a belief in divine grace as personal spiritual resources.⁸³

Depression and Suicide. Both public and private religious practice protect against depression. People who are frequently involved in religious activities and highly value their religious faith are at a reduced risk for depression, according to a review of more than 100 studies. This review also found that 87 percent of the studies surveyed concluded that religious practice correlates with reduced inci-

dence of suicide.⁸⁴ Levels of depression were also lower for those who participated in religious services than they were for those who only prayed on their own.⁸⁵

Studies have found that adolescents who frequently attend religious services and have a high level of spiritual support from others in their community have the lowest levels of depression.⁸⁶ Conversely, a lack of religious affiliation correlates with an increased risk of suicide.⁸⁷ Immigrant youth likewise enjoy the benefits of a higher level of general well-being when they attend religious services frequently.⁸⁸

Religion and Physical Health

Greater longevity is consistently and significantly related to higher levels of religious practice and involvement, regardless of the sex, race, education, or health history of those studied.⁸⁹ For example, those who are religiously involved live an average of seven years longer than those who are not. This gap is as great as that between non-smokers and those who smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. Predicting the life spans of 20-year-olds who are religiously involved compared with those who are not yields differences in life span as great as those between women and men and between whites and blacks.⁹⁰ Among African-Americans, the longevity

79. Johnson *et al.*, “Objective Hope.”

80. Neal Krause, Christopher G. Ellison, Benjamin A. Shaw, John P. Marcum, and Jason D. Boardman, “Church-Based Social Support and Religious Coping,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 637–656.

81. Ellison *et al.*, “Religious Involvement, Stress, and Mental Health.”

82. C. A. Markstrom, “Religious Involvement and Adolescent Psychosocial Development,” *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 205–221.

83. Ellison *et al.*, “Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?”

84. Johnson *et al.*, “Objective Hope.”

85. Christopher G. Ellison, “Race, Religious Involvement, and Depressive Symptomatology in a Southeastern U.S. Community,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 40, No. 11 (June 1995), pp. 1561–1572.

86. Loyd S. Wright, Christopher J. Frost, and Stephen J. Wisecarver, “Church Attendance, Meaningfulness of Religion, and Depressive Symptomatology Among Adolescents,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (October 1993), pp. 559–568.

87. Frank Tovato, “Domestic/Religious Individualism and Youth Suicide in Canada,” *Family Perspective*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1990), pp. 69–81.

88. K. Harker, “Immigration Generation, Assimilation, and Adolescent Psychological Well-Being,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (March 2001), pp. 969–1004.

89. Johnson *et al.*, “Objective Hope.”

benefit is still greater. The average life span of religious blacks is 14 years longer than that of their nonreligious peers.⁹¹

Studies on the effects of religious practice on annual death rates of various populations found that, after controlling for variables such as race, death rates for an age cohort (e.g., men age 59 or women age 71) were reduced by 28 percent to 46 percent (e.g., from 100 deaths per year to 72 deaths to 54 deaths) for that age group.⁹²

An earlier review of 250 epidemiological health research studies found a reduced risk of colitis, different types of cancer, and untimely death among people with higher levels of religious commitment.⁹³ Conversely, at any age, those who did not attend religious services had higher risks of dying from cirrhosis of the liver, emphysema, arteriosclerosis, and other cardiovascular diseases and were more likely to commit suicide, according to an even earlier review by faculty of the John Hopkins University School of Public Health.⁹⁴ The most significant pathway by which religious practice delivers these longevity benefits is a lifestyle that reduces the risk of mortality from infectious diseases and diabetes by encouraging a support network among family and friends that helps to maintain a pattern of regimented care.⁹⁵

Not only a person's own religious practice, but also parents' religious practice affects personal

health. Adolescents whose mothers attended religious services at least weekly displayed better health, greater problem-solving skills, and higher overall satisfaction with their lives, regardless of race, gender, income, or family structure, according to a study of public school children in Baltimore.⁹⁶

Religion and Educational Attainment

Because education is important for all citizens and the government invests heavily in public schooling, any factor that promotes academic achievement is important to the common good. Academic expectations, level of education attained, school attendance, and academic performance are all positively affected by religious practice. In two literature reviews conducted by Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin, educational attainment aspirations⁹⁷ and math and reading scores⁹⁸ correlated positively with more frequent religious practice.

Parents' religious practice also counts. The greater the parents' religious involvement, the more likely they will have higher educational expectations of their children and will communicate with their children regarding schooling. Their children will be more likely to pursue advanced courses, spend more time on homework, establish friendships with academically oriented peers, avoid cutting classes, and successfully complete their degrees.⁹⁹

90. Mark D. Regnerus, "Religion and Positive Adolescent Outcomes: A Review of Research and Theory," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (June 2003), pp. 394–413.

91. Robert A. Hummer, Richard G. Rogers, Charles B. Nam, and Christopher G. Ellison, "Religious Involvement and U.S. Adult Mortality," *Demography*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 1999), pp. 273–285.

92. Robert A. Hummer, Christopher G. Ellison, Richard G. Rogers, Benjamin E. Moulton, and Ron R. Romero, "Religious Involvement and Adult Mortality in the United States: Review and Perspective," *Southern Medical Journal*, Vol. 97, No. 12 (December 2004), pp. 1223–1230.

93. Jeffrey S. Levin and Preston L. Schiller, "Is There a Religious Factor in Health?" *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 9–35.

94. George W. Comstock and Kay B. Patridge, "Church Attendance and Health," *Journal of Chronic Diseases*, Vol. 25, No. 12 (December 1972), pp. 665–672.

95. Hummer *et al.*, "Religious Involvement and U.S. Adult Mortality."

96. Ellison *et al.*, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?"

97. Mark D. Regnerus, "Making the Grade: The Influence of Religion upon the Academic Performance of Youth in Disadvantaged Communities," University of Pennsylvania, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society *Report No. 3*, 2001.

98. Mark D. Regnerus, "Shaping Schooling Success: Religious Socialization and Educational Outcomes in Metropolitan Public Schools," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 39, Issue 3 (September 2000), pp. 363–370.

Students in religiously affiliated schools tend to exhibit a higher level of academic achievement than their peers in secular schools, particularly in low-income urban neighborhoods. For example, studies continue to find that inner-city students in public schools lag behind in educational achievement, compared with students in Catholic schools.¹⁰⁰

The cultural values of a religious community are also a significant pathway to academic success for adolescents. For example, to earn a high school diploma or take advanced math courses, children must plan for the future and structure their activities accordingly. Religious communities typically invest in forming an ethic of such discipline and persistence. A recent study confirms both this indirect contribution of religious community values and the direct influence of the students' own religious activities in promoting academic achievement.¹⁰¹

Earlier studies found this same relationship between religious practice and academic discipline. For example, in 1985, the groundbreaking work of Richard Freeman of Harvard University revealed that attendance at religious services and activities positively affected inner-city youth school attendance, work activity, and allocation of time—all of which were further linked to a decreased likelihood of engaging in deviant activities.¹⁰² For instance, youth who frequently attended religious services were five times less likely to skip school, compared with peers who seldom or never attended.¹⁰³

Education and Disadvantaged Youth. For youth in impoverished neighborhoods, religious attendance made the greatest difference in academic achievement prospects, according to research in 2001 by Regnerus. As rates of unemployment, pov-

erty, and female-headed households grew in a neighborhood, the impact of a student's level of religious practice on academic progress became even stronger.

Regnerus posits that churches uniquely provide "functional communities" for the poor that reinforce parental support networks, control, and norms in environments of disadvantage and dysfunction. In these neighborhoods, families are most likely to build pathways to success for their children when they closely monitor them and when they develop ties to local churches that expose their children to positive role models. Youth in high-risk neighborhoods who regularly attend religious services progress at least as satisfactorily as their peers in low-risk, middle-class neighborhoods:

Religious attendance was found to serve as a protective mechanism in high-risk communities in a way that it does not in low-risk ones, stimulating educational resilience in the lives of at-risk youth. We argue that adolescents' participation in religious communities—which often constitute the key sources of neighborhood developmental resources—reinforces messages about working hard and staying out of trouble, orients them toward a positive future, and builds a transferable skill set of commitments and routines.¹⁰⁴

Regnerus goes on to suggest that religious affiliation had a positive impact on educational attainment for African-Americans residing in a high-risk neighborhood, even when controlling for family structure, although its effect was strongest for youth living in two-parent families.¹⁰⁵ The role of religion in build-

99. Chandra Muller and Christopher G. Ellison, "Religious Involvement, Social Capital, and Adolescents' Academic Progress: Evidence from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988," *Sociological Focus*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May 2001), pp. 155–183.

100. See Derek Neal, "What Have We Learned About the Benefits of Private Schooling?" Federal Reserve Bank of New York *Economic Policy Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 1998), pp. 79–86.

101. Muller and Ellison, "Religious Involvement, Social Capital, and Adolescents' Academic Progress."

102. Richard B. Freeman, "Who Escapes? The Relation of Churchgoing and Other Background Factors to the Socioeconomic Performance of Black Male Youths from Inner-City Tracts," National Bureau of Economic Research *Working Paper* No. 1656, June 1985.

103. Douglas M. Sloane and Raymond H. Potvin, "Religion and Delinquency: Cutting Through the Maze," *Social Forces*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (September 1986), pp. 87–105.

104. Regnerus, "Making the Grade."

ing relationships and habits of hard work “reinforces a conventional (as opposed to alternate or illegal) orientation to success and achievement.” Youth religious affiliation in combination with religious families and friends serves to integrate youth into the broader society and shapes their aspirations for education and achievement.¹⁰⁶

Religion and Community

Religious practice benefits not only individuals, but also communities. Religiously active men and women are often more sensitive to others, more likely to serve and give to those in need, and more likely to be productive members of their communities.

Compassion and Charity. Religious practice is linked to greater generosity in charitable giving. In extensive research documenting the relationship between religion and philanthropy, Arthur Brooks of Syracuse University demonstrated that religious practice correlates with a higher rate of care and concern for others. Compared with peers with no religious affiliation, religious respondents were 15 percent more likely to report having tender, concerned feelings for the disadvantaged. This gap was reduced by only 2 percent when the effects of education, income, marital status, sex, race, and age were taken into account.

The correlation between religion and increased charitable giving crosses ideological boundaries. When Brooks divided the survey population into quadrants of politically conservative, liberal, secular, and religious respondents, he found that the impact of religion on compassion applied regardless of the political perspective. Religious conservatives were 6 percent more likely to be concerned about the disadvantaged than were secular liberals, while religious liberals were 24 percentage points more likely to express such feelings of compassion than were secular conservatives.

Among the general survey population, religious individuals were 40 percent more likely than their secular counterparts to give money to charities and more than twice as likely to volunteer. Among those who felt compassion for the disadvantaged, religious respondents were 23 percentage points more likely to donate to charities at least yearly and 32 percentage points more likely to donate monthly than were their secular counterparts. They were 34 percentage points more likely to volunteer at least yearly and 22 percentage points more likely to volunteer monthly.¹⁰⁷

Regnerus and his colleagues found similar correlations between religious adherents and charitable giving in an analysis of the 1996 Pew survey on religious identity and influence. Individuals with a religious affiliation were 30 percent more likely to donate to organizations assisting the poor when compared with their secular counterparts.¹⁰⁸

The impact of religious practice on formal charity had additional significance for community cohesion. Individuals who gave to charitable organizations were 21 percentage points more likely to give informally (e.g., to family and friends).¹⁰⁹

Ram Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania found that congregations as communities were almost universally involved in collective charitable outreach. In an extensive survey of religious institutions in Philadelphia, Cnaan found that 91 percent of the congregations surveyed had at least one community program that supplied goods and services to those in need, including food pantries, prison ministries, summer camps, and substance abuse prevention programs. He estimated the replacement value of the services provided by congregations in Philadelphia to be \$228 million a year in the late 1990s.¹¹⁰

Violent Crime. Just as the stable marriage of parents is powerful in preventing crime,¹¹¹ so too is the practice of religion. A review of the literature

105. Brown and Gary, “Religious Socialization and Educational Attainment Among African Americans.”

106. Regnerus, “Shaping Schooling Success.”

107. Arthur C. Brooks, “Compassion, Religion, and Politics,” *Public Interest*, September 22, 2004, pp. 57–66.

108. Mark D. Regnerus, Christian Smith, and David Sikkink, “Who Gives to the Poor? The Influence of Religious Tradition and Political Location on the Personal Generosity of Americans Toward the Poor,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (September 1998), pp. 481–493.

109. Brooks, “Compassion, Religion, and Politics.”

on religion and crime suggests that, compared with less religious counterparts, religiously involved individuals are less likely to carry or use weapons, fight, or exhibit violent behavior. At the metropolitan level of analysis, areas with high rates of congregational membership and areas with high levels of religious homogeneity tend to have lower homicide and suicide rates than other metropolitan areas.¹¹² Similarly, at the state level of analysis, states with more religious populations tend to have fewer homicides and fewer suicides.¹¹³

Immigrant Assimilation. Religion plays a role in helping immigrants to adjust to their new homeland. In research on the role of the ethnic church in the social adjustment of Vietnamese adolescents, including their educational success, regular religious attendance was found to increase the likelihood that youth would attend after-school classes, as well as the likelihood that they would retain their ethnic cohesion. Even after controlling for other variables, these activities and religious service attendance correlated with better grades, avoidance of substance abuse, and the importance attached to attending college—all of which aided their successful integration into American society.¹¹⁴ Thus, religious practice was a significant bridge from their culture of origin to success in their new homeland.

Religion and At-Risk Youth

Even against the odds, in neighborhoods of disorder and poverty, religious practice serves as a sig-

nificant buffer against drug abuse and juvenile delinquency. A study of 2,358 young black males from impoverished inner-city Chicago and Philadelphia found that a high level of religious attendance was associated with a 46 percent reduction in the likelihood of using drugs, a 57 percent reduction in the probability of dealing drugs, and a 39 percent decrease in the likelihood of committing a crime that was not drug-related. Thus, religious attendance was associated with direct decreases in both minor and major forms of crime and deviance to an extent unrivalled by government welfare programs.¹¹⁵

The effect of religion is not solely a matter of external controls that curb adolescents' risky behavior. Rather, religious attendance also promotes self-control, a positive allocation of time, attendance at school, and engagement in work.¹¹⁶ In addition, youth religious practice is linked to a decreased likelihood of associating with delinquent peers—a significant factor in youth crime.¹¹⁷

Drug Use in Inner-City Neighborhoods. While religious practice appears to have a general restraining effect on the likelihood of using drugs, this effect appears to be especially strong for adolescents living in higher-risk neighborhoods, where increased religious practice coincides with substantially decreased drug use.¹¹⁸ African-American youth living in impoverished urban neighborhoods who attended religious services at least weekly were half as likely to use illicit drugs as those who never attended.¹¹⁹

110. Ram A. Cnaan, "The Philadelphia Story: Preliminary Findings from the Philadelphia Census," Hartford Institute for Religious Research, at www.hirr.hartsem.edu/cong/research_phillycensus.html (December 7, 2006), and Ram A. Cnaan and Stephanie C. Boddie, "Philadelphia Census of Congregations and Their Involvement in Social Service Delivery," *Social Service Review*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 559–589.
111. Patrick F. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1026, March 17, 1995, at www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/bg1026.cfm.
112. Hummer *et al.*, "Religious Involvement and Adult Mortality in the United States," pp. 1224–1225.
113. David Lester, "Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 127, No. 6 (December 1987), pp. 685–686.
114. Ellison *et al.*, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?"
115. Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, Spencer De Li, and Sung Joon Jang, "Escaping from the Crime of Inner Cities: Church Attendance and Religious Salience Among Disadvantaged Youth," *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 377–39.
116. Freeman, "Who Escapes?"
117. Johnson and Larson, "Religion," and Byron R. Johnson, "Does Adolescent Religious Commitment Matter? A Reexamination of the Effects of Religiosity on Delinquency," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (February 2001), pp. 22–43.

Furthermore, an analysis of national longitudinal data indicates that religious youth from low-income neighborhoods are not only less likely than non-religious neighborhood peers to use illegal drugs, but also less likely than peers in “good” neighborhoods who have low levels of religious commitment.¹²⁰ In preventing drug abuse, religious practice trumps socioeconomic disadvantage.

Juvenile Delinquency. In at-risk, destabilized communities, religious practice was found to be a buffer against youth crime in the same way that it reduced the likelihood of substance abuse among adolescents. Even in communities where there are no strong social controls against delinquent behavior, religious commitment and involvement protects youth from antisocial behavior—both minor and serious. In the Add Health Survey, a major national survey of adolescents, a 6 percent reduction in delinquency was associated with a one-point increase on an index that combined adolescents’ frequency of religious service with their rating of the importance of religion.¹²¹

Mothers’ religious practice is also an influence in reducing the likelihood that children will become delinquent. Each unit increase in a mother’s religious practice is associated with a 9 percent decline in her child’s delinquency. The adolescents at lowest risk for delinquency typically have highly religious mothers and are themselves highly religious.¹²² Even in cases in which young people

have become involved in deviant behavior, specific types of religious activity can help to steer them back on the right course and away from further criminal activity. In addition, evidence indicates that religious involvement during adolescence has a cumulative effect and thus may significantly reduce the likelihood that a young person will commit crimes in adulthood.¹²³

Negative Outcomes

The vast majority of the studies reviewed give evidence of numerous societal benefits of religious belief and practice. However, relatively few studies indicate some unintended negative outcomes.

Religion and Sexual Behavior. Although frequent religious attendance is highly correlated with less sexual activity among those who are not married, some religiously observant individuals do become sexually active. These individuals tend to use contraception less and thus do not have the protection of abstinence or barriers to prevent pregnancy or infection.¹²⁴ Among adolescent males from divorced families, there are indications of a positive correlation between frequent church attendance and an increased number of sexual partners. This relationship, however, does not appear among female adolescents from divorced families.¹²⁵

Motivation for Religious Practice. Researchers cite two types of motivation for religious practice: intrinsic and extrinsic.¹²⁶ Intrinsic and extrinsic

118. Increased religious practice coincides with decreases of 27 percent for marijuana use and 33 percent for hard drugs. Jang and Johnson, “Neighborhood Disorder, Individual Religiosity, and Adolescent Use of Illicit Drugs.”

119. Johnson and Larson, “Religion.”

120. Johnson, “A Better Kind of High.”

121. Pearce and Haynie, “Intergenerational Religious Dynamics and Adolescent Delinquency.”

122. *Ibid.*

123. Johnson *et al.*, “Objective Hope.”

124. For original research results and a review of related literature, see Marlena Studer and Arland Thornton, “Adolescent Religiosity and Contraceptive Usage,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (February 1987), pp. 117–128, and Jennifer S. Manlove, Elizabeth Terry Humen, Erum Ikramullah, and Kristin A. Moore, “The Role of Parent Religiosity in Teen’s Transition to Sex and Contraception,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 39, Issue 4 (October 2006), pp. 578–587.

125. See Patrick Fagan, Kirk A. Johnson, and Jonathan Butcher, “A Portrait of Family and Religion in America: Key Outcomes for the Common Good,” The Heritage Foundation, 2006, p. 33, Chart 26, and p. 34, Chart 27, at www.heritage.org/upload/Map_of_Religion.pdf.

126. David B. Larson and Susan S. Larson, *The Forgotten Factor in Physical and Mental Health: What Does the Research Show?* (Rockville, Md.: National Institute for Healthcare Research, 1994), p. 87.

motivations for religious practice seem to result in two very different types of outcomes.

Intrinsic motivation is related to moral standards, conscientiousness, discipline, responsibility, and consistency.¹²⁷ Those who are intrinsically motivated (intrinsic) are likely to be more sensitive to others and more understanding of their own emotions. They tend to have a greater sense of responsibility, are more self-motivated, and have greater internal control.

By contrast, extrinsic motivation relies on secular benefits such as those derived from religious affiliation and is often linked to self-indulgence, indolence, and a lack of dependability. Such individuals (extrinsic) are more likely to be dogmatic, authoritarian, and less responsible. They also tend to have less internal control and are less self-directed.¹²⁸ Furthermore, numerous findings link extrinsic religious motivation to similar, self-centered behaviors.¹²⁹ For example, studies documenting racial prejudice among church members found that those who are the most racially prejudiced either attend religious services infrequently or are extrinsically motivated and practice religion simply as a means for fulfilling their own ends (e.g., membership in a social group) rather than for prayer and worship.

In general, extrinsic have more anxiety about life's ups and downs than intrinsic do. Intrinsic' religious beliefs and practices are more integrated and consistent. For instance, they are more likely to attend public religious services and pray privately. By contrast, those who pray only privately and do

not attend public religious services tend to have a higher level of general anxiety, a characteristic typical of extrinsic.¹³⁰ One set of findings on anxiety about death showed that extrinsic fared worse than intrinsic believers, but also worse than those who do not profess religious belief.¹³¹ All of these findings confirm the conclusion in 1968 of Gordon Allport, then professor of psychology at Harvard University: "I feel equally sure that mental health is facilitated by an intrinsic, but not an extrinsic, religious orientation."¹³²

Despite some findings indicating the occasional negative outcomes, the vast majority of research studies cite the positive effects of religious practice. Typically, findings of negative effects are linked to specific circumstances related to particular forms of religious practice, most of which could be described as "malpractice" of religion.

Summary and Policy Implications

Strong and repeated evidence indicates that the regular practice of religion has beneficial effects in nearly every aspect of social concern and policy. This evidence shows that religious practice protects against social disorder and dysfunction.

Specifically, the available data clearly indicate that religious belief and practice are associated with:

- Higher levels of marital happiness and stability;
- Stronger parent-child relationships;
- Greater educational aspirations and attainment, especially among the poor;
- Higher levels of good work habits;

127. Ken F. Wiebe and J. Roland Fleck, "Personality Correlates of Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Non-Religious Orientations," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (July 1980), pp. 111-117.

128. Richard D. Kahoe, "Personality and Achievement Correlates on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (June 1974), pp. 812-818.

129. Allen E. Bergin, Kevin S. Masters, and P. Scott Richards, "Religiousness and Mental Health Reconsidered: A Study of an Intrinsically Religious Sample," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 34, Issue 2 (April 1987), pp. 197-204; Mark Baker and Richard Gorsuch, "Trait Anxiety and Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religiousness," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1982), pp. 119-122; Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1967), pp. 432-443.

130. Bergin *et al.*, "Religiousness and Mental Health Reconsidered."

131. Ann M. Downey, "Relationships of Religiosity to Death Anxiety of Middle-Aged Males," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (June 1984), pp. 811-822.

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

- Greater longevity and physical health;
- Higher levels of well-being and happiness;
- Higher recovery rates from addictions to alcohol or drugs;
- Higher levels of self-control, self-esteem, and coping skills;
- Higher rates of charitable donations and volunteering; and
- Higher levels of community cohesion and social support for those in need.

The evidence further demonstrates that religious belief and practice are also associated with:

- Lower divorce rates;
- Lower cohabitation rates;
- Lower rates of out-of-wedlock births;
- Lower levels of teen sexual activity;
- Less abuse of alcohol and drugs;
- Lower rates of suicide, depression, and suicide ideation;
- Lower levels of many infectious diseases;
- Less juvenile crime;
- Less violent crime; and
- Less domestic violence.

No other dimension of life in America—with the exception of stable marriages and families, which in turn are strongly tied to religious practice—does more to promote the well-being and soundness of the nation's civil society than citizens' religious observance. As George Washington asserted, the success of the Republic depends on the practice of religion by its citizens. These findings from 21st century social science support his observation.

What Policymakers Should Do

The original intent of the Founding Fathers was not to bar religion from the public arena, but to guard against the federal government's establishment of a particular state-approved church.

At the federal, state, and local levels, policymakers should work to encourage an environment in which

religious institutions and organizations can thrive and citizens can actively practice their faith—both privately and publicly. In doing so, government entities can remain neutral with regard to particular faiths while still respecting the rights of citizens who are not affiliated with any religion or faith.

Specifically, Congress should:

- **Pass a sense of Congress resolution finding that data on religious practice are useful to policymakers and researchers who inform the public debate.** Such a resolution would remove the misconception that legislators are not permitted to be concerned with the religious dimension of life. In the words of the late Justice William O. Douglas (who was not considered a conservative on the Supreme Court):

We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being. We guarantee the freedom to worship as one chooses. [When] the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian needs, [it] respects the religious nature of our people and accommodates the public service to their spiritual needs. To hold that it may not would be to find in the Constitution a requirement that the government show a callous indifference to religious groups. That would be preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe.¹³³

- **Ensure the collection of better information from existing periodic national surveys on the prevalence of religious practice and the association between religion and societal well-being.** For instance, the American Community Survey and the Census Bureau's March Supplement to the Current Population Survey should be augmented to include a measure of the level of respondents' religious practice. This would permit an analysis of the effect of religious practice on the myriad aspects of national life that are studied.

133. *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952).

In general, policymakers also should:

- **Become acquainted with research showing that religious practice serves the common good.** This should inform their policy decision-making and equip them to lead an ongoing national discussion on the vital and constructive role of religion in American life. The purpose of this dialogue would not be to enact legislation, but to highlight through public discourse the association between religious belief and practice and the well-being of American society. Such discussions would promote understanding, appreciation, and cooperation among citizens of different faiths while simultaneously respecting the freedom of those who do not have a religious affiliation or an inclination to practice any religion.
- **Consider the evidence on the effectiveness of faith-based approaches to social problems.** Faith-based social service ministries have unique competencies in addressing some of the most difficult social problems. By some estimates, these organizations provide \$20 billion worth of privately funded social service delivery for more than 70 million Americans each year. There are significant indications that faith-based social service programs are more effective than their secular counterparts.

A comprehensive review of the literature on the effectiveness of faith-based organizations contrasted the impacts of secular and faith-based programs in different service areas, from the treatment of addictions to “re-entry to society” programs for former prisoners.¹³⁴ In all but one of the 11 multivariate studies reviewed, faith-based programs were significantly more effective than secular counterparts.¹³⁵ These effective faith-based ministries have the potential to reduce dependency on government services, and policymakers should consider how to create an environment in which they can operate freely and to greatest effect.

Conclusion

A steadily increasing body of evidence from the social sciences demonstrates that regular religious practice benefits individuals, families, and communities, and thus the nation as a whole. The practice of religion improves health, academic achievement, and economic well-being and fosters self-control, self-esteem, empathy, and compassion.

Religious belief and practice can address many of the nation’s most pressing social problems, some of which have reached serious levels (e.g., out-of-wedlock births and family dissolution). Research has linked the practice of religion to reductions in the incidence of divorce, crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, out-of-wedlock births, health problems, anxiety, and prejudice. Faith-based outreach has been uniquely effective in drug addiction rehabilitation and societal re-entry programs for prisoners. Furthermore, the effects of religious belief and practice are intergenerational and cumulative. In a sense, they “compound the interest” of our social capital.

Allan Bergin, a research psychologist who received the American Psychological Association’s top award in 1990, summed up the impact of religion in his acceptance address: “Some religious influences have a modest impact whereas another portion seems like the mental equivalent of nuclear energy.”¹³⁶

Freedom from an established religion is compatible with the freedom to fully practice one’s religious beliefs. This freedom is very different from purported protection *from* religious influence. To work to reduce the influence of religious belief or practice is to further the disintegration of society. Some may be uncomfortable with the religious beliefs and practices of others, but that discomfort is small compared to the effects of having a society with little or no religious practice. America’s ongoing national experiment with freedom now faces anew the challenge of balancing society’s need for the benefits that religion brings, its commitment to religious plural-

134. Johnson *et al.*, “Objective Hope.”

135. Byron R. Johnson, “Religious Programs and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs: A Long-Term Follow-Up Study,” *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 2004), pp. 329–354.

136. Allen E. Bergin, “Values and Religious Issues in Psychotherapy and Mental Health,” *The American Psychologist*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (April 1991), pp. 394–403.

ism in the political order, and the rights of those who choose to live with no religious conviction.

Our Founding Fathers, in their dedication to liberty, promoted the freedom of all Americans to practice religious beliefs, or not, as they choose. Although the freedom not to practice religion is intrinsic to religious freedom, that protection does not mean that this non-practice of religion is equally beneficial to society. Social science data

reinforce George Washington's declaration in his farewell address: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

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