

# Propositions and Definitions

## CHAPTER 4. THE MICRO FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION

- PROPOSITION 1. Within the limits of their information and understanding, restricted by available options, guided by their preferences and tastes, humans attempt to make rational choices.
- PROPOSITION 2. Humans are conscious beings having memory and intelligence who are able to formulate explanations about how rewards can be gained and costs avoided.
  - Definition 1. Explanations are conceptual simplifications or models of reality that often provide plans designed to guide action.
- PROPOSITION 3. Humans will attempt to evaluate explanations on the basis of results, retaining those that seem to work most efficiently.
- PROPOSITION 4. Rewards are always limited in supply, including some that simply do not exist in the observable world.
- PROPOSITION 5. To the degree that rewards are scarce, or are not directly available at all, humans will tend to formulate and accept explanations for obtaining the reward in the distant future or in some other nonverifiable context.
  - Definition 2. Otherworldly rewards are those that will be obtained only in a nonempirical (usually posthumous) context.
  - Definition 3. Supernatural refers to forces or entities beyond or outside nature that can suspend, alter, or ignore physical forces.
- PROPOSITION 6. In pursuit of rewards, humans will seek to utilize and manipulate the supernatural.
- PROPOSITION 7. Humans will not have recourse to the supernatural when a cheaper or more efficient alternative is known and available.
  - Definition 4. Gods are supernatural "beings" having consciousness and desire.
- PROPOSITION 8. In pursuit of rewards, humans will seek to exchange with a god or gods.
  - Definition 5. Religion consists of very general explanations of existence, including the terms of exchange with a god or gods.
- PROPOSITION 9. The greater the number of gods worshipped by a group, the lower the price of exchanging with each.
- PROPOSITION 10. In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be more dependable.
  - Definition 6. Dependable means the gods can be relied upon to keep their word and to be consistent in their orientations towards humans.
  - Definition 6a. Good gods are those who intend to allow humans to profit from their exchanges.
  - Definition 6b. Evil gods are those who intend to inflict coercive exchanges or deceptions on humans, resulting in losses for human exchange partners.
  - Definition 6c. Inconsistent gods are those who alternate unpredictably between benign and evil orientations toward humans.
- PROPOSITION 11. In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be more responsive.
  - Definition 7. Responsive means the gods are concerned about, are informed about, and act on behalf of humans.
- PROPOSITION 12. In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent

that the gods are believed to be of greater scope.

- Definition 8. The scope of the gods refers to the diversity of their powers and the range of their influence.
- PROPOSITION 13. The greater their scope (and the more responsive they are), the more plausible it will be that gods can provide otherworldly rewards. Conversely, exchanges with gods of smaller scope will tend to be limited to worldly rewards.
- PROPOSITION 14. In pursuit of otherworldly rewards, humans will accept an extended exchange relationship.
  - Definition 9. An extended exchange relationship is one in which the human makes periodic payments over a substantial length of time, often until death.
- PROPOSITION 15. In pursuit of otherworldly rewards, humans will accept an exclusive exchange relationship.
  - Definition 10. An exclusive exchange relationship is one in which the human may exchange only with one specific god (and approved subordinate gods, such as angels).
- PROPOSITION 16. People will seek to delay their payment of religious costs. PROPOSITION 17. People will seek to minimize their religious costs.
  - Definition 11. An ecclesiastic is anyone who specializes in religion—in explaining, supervising, and/or conducting exchanges with a god or gods.
  - Definition 12. Religious organizations are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and supply religion to some set of individuals and to support and supervise their exchanges with a god or gods.
- PROPOSITION 18. A religious organization will be able to require extended and exclusive commitments to the extent that it offers otherworldly rewards.
  - Definition 13. Religious commitment is the degree to which humans promptly meet the terms of exchange with a god or gods as specified by the explanations of a given religious organization.
  - Definition 14. Objective religious commitment refers to all behavior in accord with the explanations sustained by a religious organization.
  - Definition 15. Subjective religious commitment involves belief in, and knowledge of, the explanations sustained by a religious organization and having the appropriate emotions.
  - Definition 16. Magic refers to all efforts to manipulate supernatural forces to gain rewards (or avoid costs) without reference to a god or gods or to general explanations of existence.
- PROPOSITION 19. Magic cannot generate extended or exclusive patterns of exchange.
- PROPOSITION 20. Magicians will serve individual clients, not lead an organization.
- PROPOSITION 21. All religious explanations, and especially those concerning otherworldly rewards, entail risk.
- PROPOSITION 22. An individual's confidence in religious explanations is strengthened to the extent that others express their confidence in them.
- PROPOSITION 23. Confidence in religious explanations increases to the extent that people participate in religious rituals.
  - Definition 17. Religious rituals are collective ceremonies having a common focus and mood in which the common focus is on a god or gods, while the common mood may vary.
- PROPOSITION 24. Prayer builds bonds of affection and confidence between humans and a god or gods.
  - Definition 18. Prayer is a communication addressed to a god or gods.
- PROPOSITION 25. Confidence in religious explanations will increase to the degree that miracles are credited to the religion.
  - Definition 19. Miracles are desirable effects believed to be caused by the intervention of a

- god or gods in worldly matters.
- PROPOSITION 26. Confidence in religious explanations will increase to the degree that people have mystical experiences.
  - Definition 20. Mystical experiences are some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a god or gods.
- PROPOSITION 27. Confidence in the explanations offered by a religion will be greater to the extent that its ecclesiastics display levels of commitment greater than that expected of followers.
- PROPOSITION 28. Vigorous efforts by religious organizations are required to motivate and sustain high levels of individual religious commitment.

## **CHAPTER 5. RELIGIOUS CHOICES: CONVERSION AND REAFFILIATION**

- Definition 21. Conversion refers to shifts across religious traditions.
  - Definition 22. Reaffiliation refers to shifts within religious traditions.
  - Definition 23. Social capital consists of interpersonal attachments.
- PROPOSITION 29. In making religious choices, people will attempt to con-serve their social capital.
- PROPOSITION 30. Under normal circumstances, most people will neither convert nor reaffiliate.
- PROPOSITION 31. To the extent that people have or develop stronger attachments to those committed to a different version of their traditional religion, they will reaffiliate.
- PROPOSITION 32. To the extent that people have or develop stronger attachments to those committed to a religion in a different tradition, they will convert.
  - Definition 24. Religious capital consists of the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture.
- PROPOSITION 33. In making religious choices, people will attempt to con-serve their religious capital.
- PROPOSITION 34. The greater their religious capital, the less likely people are either to reaffiliate or to convert.
- PROPOSITION 35. Reaffiliation will be far more prevalent than conversion (under normal conditions).
- PROPOSITION 36. When people reaffiliate, they will tend to select an option that maximizes their conservation of religious capital.
- PROPOSITION 37. When people convert, they will tend to select an option that maximizes their conservation of religious capital.
- PROPOSITION 38. Most people will marry within their religious group.
- PROPOSITION 39. In mixed religious marriages, spouses usually will be of very similar religious backgrounds, belonging to groups within the same religious tradition.
- PROPOSITION 40. Mixed religious marriages are more likely to the degree that one or both spouses lack religious capital.
- PROPOSITION 41. When mixed religious marriages occur, the couple maximize their religious capital when the partner with the lower level of commitment reaffiliates or converts to the religion of the more committed partner.

## **CHAPTER 6. RELIGIOUS GROUP DYNAMICS**

- PROPOSITION 42. Among religious organizations, there is a reciprocal relationship between the degree of lay commitment and the degree of exclusivity.
- PROPOSITION 43. All religious groups can be located along an axis of tension between the group and its sociocultural environment.
  - Definition 25. Tension refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism in the relationship between a religious group and the "outside" world.
  - Definition 26. Churches are religious bodies in relatively lower tension with their surroundings.
  - Definition 27. Sects are religious bodies in relatively higher tension with their surroundings.
- PROPOSITION 44. The higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more extensive the commitment to a religious organization.
  - Definition 28. As applied to religious commitment, extensive refers to the range and depth of religious effects on the individual.
- PROPOSITION 45. The higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more expensive it is belong to a religious group.
  - Definition 29. As applied to religious commitment, expensive refers to the material, social, and psychic costs of belonging to a religious group.
- PROPOSITION 46. The higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more exclusive, extensive, and expensive is the level of commitment required by a religious group.
- PROPOSITION 47. The higher a group's level of tension with its surroundings, the higher its average level of member commitment.
- PROPOSITION 48. Among religious organizations, there is a reciprocal relationship between expense and the value of the rewards of membership.
- PROPOSITION 49. There is a reciprocal relationship between commitment and growth.
- PROPOSITION 50. As religious organizations grow, their congregations will tend to become larger.
  - Definition 30. Congregation refers to the smallest, relatively autonomous membership unit within a religious organization.
- PROPOSITION 51. Congregational size is inversely related to the average level of member commitment.
- PROPOSITION 52. The larger the congregation, the less dense the social net-works within the group.
- PROPOSITION 53. The less dense the networks within a congregation are, the lower the average level of reinforcement provided for commitment.
- PROPOSITION 54. The less dense networks within a congregation are, the less efficient the monitoring of member behavior.
- PROPOSITION 55. The larger the congregation, the higher the proportion of free-riders.
- PROPOSITION 56. The less dense the networks within a congregation, the stronger the ties maintained to external networks.
- PROPOSITION 57. The more prevalent member ties to external networks, the greater the pressure on the group to reduce tension.
- PROPOSITION 58. As religious organizations grow, their administrative sector grows more rapidly.
- PROPOSITION 59. As the administrative sector expands, authority will be-come more centralized and policies will be standardized.
- PROPOSITION 60. As authority becomes more centralized it will tend to be more exclusively in the hands of professional ecclesiastics.

- Definition 31. A profession is an occupational group claiming sole possession of the training, talent, or other qualifications needed to perform a specific occupational role.
- PROPOSITION 61. Professional ecclesiastics will seek to define the necessary qualifications for the performance of their role.
- PROPOSITION 62. Professional ecclesiastics will attempt to control entry into the profession.
- PROPOSITION 63. Professional ecclesiastics will seek to improve their ratio of rewards to costs.
- PROPOSITION 64. Professional ecclesiastics will favor growth.
- PROPOSITION 65. To the extent that ecclesiastics enjoy a favorable reward ratio, religious motives will be less important among those entering the position.
- PROPOSITION 66. Growth (especially at the congregational level) and the professionalization of their ecclesiastics will tend to shift religious organizations from higher to lower tension—from sects to churches.
- PROPOSITION 67. Professional ecclesiastics will seek to minimize diversity, especially with respect to organizational practices.
- PROPOSITION 68. To the extent that tendencies toward greater tension are suppressed, the average level of commitment of a religious group will be reduced by the departure or expulsion of the most highly committed members.

## **CHAPTER 8. A THEORETICAL MODEL OF RELIGIOUS ECONOMIES**

- Definition 32. A religious economy consists of all the religious activity going on in any society: a "market" of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s).
- PROPOSITION 69. Because exclusive religious organizations offer more valuable and apparently less risky religious rewards, when exclusive firms appear in religious economies previously dominated by nonexclusive groups, the exclusive firm(s) become dominant.
- PROPOSITION 70. All religious economies include a set of relatively stable market niches.
  - Definition 33. Niches are market segments of potential adherents sharing particular religious preferences (needs, tastes, and expectations).
- PROPOSITION 71. To the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic.
  - Definition 34. Pluralistic refers to the number of firms active in the economy; the more firms there are with significant market shares, the greater the degree of pluralism.
- PROPOSITION 72. The capacity of a single religious firm to monopolize a religious economy depends upon the degree to which the state uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy.
- PROPOSITION 73. To the degree that a religious firm achieves a monopoly, it will seek to exert its influence over other institutions, and the society will thus be sacralized.
  - Definition 35. Sacralized means that there is little differentiation between religious and secular institutions and that the primary aspects of life, from family to politics, are suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, and ritual.
- PROPOSITION 74. To the degree that deregulation of the religious economy occurs in a previously highly regulated economy, the society will be desacralized.
- PROPOSITION 75. To the degree that religious economies are unregulated and competitive, overall levels of religious commitment will be high. (Conversely, lacking competition, the dominant firm[s] will be too inefficient to sustain vigorous marketing efforts, and the result will

be a low overall level of religious commitment, with the average person minimizing and delaying payment of religious costs.)

- PROPOSITION 76. Even where competition is limited, religious firms can generate high levels of commitment to the extent that the firms serve as the primary organizational vehicles for social conflict. (Conversely, if religious firms become significantly less important as vehicles for social conflict, they will be correspondingly less able to generate commitment.)
- PROPOSITION 77. Societies with low levels of religious participation will be lacking in effective religious socialization.
- PROPOSITION 78. Where large numbers of people receive ineffective religious socialization, subjective religiousness will tend to be idiosyncratic and heterodox but far more widespread than organized religious participation.
- PROPOSITION 79. The capacity of new religious firms to enter relatively unregulated markets successfully is inverse to the efficiency and variety of existing religious firms.
- PROPOSITION 80. Religious organizations mainly originate through sect formation.
- PROPOSITION 81. Sect movements that endure and grow will tend to reduce their tension with the sociocultural environment, thereby moving away from the market niche(s) in which they originally were based (a process referred to as the sect-to-church transformation).
- PROPOSITION 82. As sects initially lower their tension they become more appealing to larger niches and will therefore grow.
- PROPOSITION 83. As religious groups move into range of the largest niches and abandon their original market niche(s), they tend to suffer schisms as sect movements break away to serve members with higher tension preferences.
- PROPOSITION 84. Where free market conditions prevail, given the relative size of niches, at any given moment, religious bodies based on medium tension niches will enroll the larger portion of the population.
- PROPOSITION 85. As moderate religious bodies continue to reduce their tension, they move away from the larger niches and cease to grow.
- PROPOSITION 86. At any given moment, religious growth will therefore be limited primarily to somewhat higher tension bodies.
- PROPOSITION 87. Because of the transformation of sects into churches, there will tend to be an oversupply of lower-tension religious bodies.
- PROPOSITION 88. Low-tension bodies will typically have declining memberships and will tend to disappear via mergers.
- PROPOSITION 89. Because of the transformation of sects into churches, there will tend to be an undersupply of religious bodies serving the medium-tension niches, creating an opportunity for new bodies, most of which will migrate from stricter niches.
- PROPOSITION 90. Religious organizations are easier to form to the extent that they can be sustained by a small number of members.
- PROPOSITION 91. Most religious groups will begin in a relatively high state of tension.
- PROPOSITION 92. Most sects do not reduce their initial level of tension and do not grow, and the high-tension end of the church-sect spectrum will therefore abound in small, unsuccessful religious organizations.
- PROPOSITION 93. Church movements are formed by dissidents wishing to shift to a lower-tension niche who lack the power to shift the organization.
  - Definition 36. Church movements are schismatic movements that break away to enter a lower level of tension.
- PROPOSITION 94. If the secular rewards of religious vocations decline, then religious rewards must play an increasing part in the motivation of those who pursue such vocations.

- PROPOSITION 95. To the extent that religious rewards motivate religious leaders, they will prefer a relatively higher level of tension for the group.
- PROPOSITION 96. As a religious body in a low state of tension moves to a higher state of tension, it moves from smaller to larger niches and has an increased opportunity for growth.
- PROPOSITION 97. In an unregulated religious economy, where the survival of all religious groups rests on market processes, growth will facilitate the efforts of clergy to move a group into lower or higher tension.

## **CHAPTER 10. CHURCH-TO-SECT MOVEMENTS**

- PROPOSITION 98. Initial shifts toward higher tension will occur primarily at the congregational level and will be reflected at the denominational level as a cumulative result of congregational shifts.
- PROPOSITION 99. The church-to-sect process is far more likely to occur in relatively unregulated religious economies where the survival of all religious groups rests on market processes than in regulated economies featuring subsidized denominations.