Religiosity and Marital Commitment: ‘Until Death Do Us Part’ Revisited

LYLE E. LARSON*

The purpose of this paper is to review the linkages between the religious factor and commitment to marriage. The nature and meaning of marital commitment is briefly discussed in the first section. Section two examines the research using religious affiliation as a predictor in explaining marital stability and satisfaction. Religious affiliation seems to be a significant influence in keeping marriages together. There is, however, increasing evidence that "affiliation" is a less elegant measure of the religious factor than actual participation in more conservative religious groups. The third section reviews the linkages between religious commitment (as indicated by religious attendance, measures of religiosity, and religious community) and commitment to marriage and family. Religious commitment is an apparent and quite consistent correlate of marital satisfaction and stability. The evidence, even so, is far from definitive. Several theoretical and methodological concerns in the use of the religious factor in research are raised. Suggestions are made for further research.

Religion always has been a significant part of the beliefs and experience of the majority of individuals and families throughout the life span. Despite this apparent fact, the connection of the religious variable to family life has been markedly absent from family theory and research in the 1960s and 1970s. Only three entries concerning religion and family life appear in the index of the Handbook of Marriage and the Family edited by Christensen in 1964 (Thomas & Henry, 1985). The more recent two-volume work, Contemporary Theories about the Family (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979) contains only two references to religion in the indexes of both volumes.

Even so, the importance of the religious factor in family life is once again the subject of a growing body of research. Extant research tends to emphasize the role of religion as either a control or support variable. The fact that religion consistently operates as a powerful deterrent to divorce is an example of the control dimension (cf. Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Booth & White, 1980; Bugaighis, Schumm, Jurich, & Jurich, 1985/1986; Halliday, 1980; Heaton, Albrecht, & Martin, 1985; Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985; Nye, White, & Frideres, 1973). Although the support dimension of religion has been underemphasized, research continues to show a significant relationship between religiosity (the typical measure is religious participation) and marital adjustment and satisfaction (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Glenn & Weaver, 1978; Wilson & Filsinger, 1986). The two research studies by Filsinger and Wilson, as well as Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich (1982), clearly discount the argument that religion and

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*Lyle E. Larson, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB Canada T6G 2H4

conventionality are not identical phenomena - a strong relationship between religious experience and marital satisfaction remains when conventionality is controlled.

The particular purpose of this paper is to review research that relates to a high profile attribute of both religious support and control, the nature and meaning of commitment to marriage. The importance of this "commitment" is encapsulated in most marriage ceremonies, the idea that marriage is a permanent relationship to be ended only by death. In an idealistic sense, the phrases "until death do us part" (a religious dimension) and "to love and to cherish" (a longstanding artifact of culture) were both a significant part of our history. As will be demonstrated in this paper, however, these concepts no longer have the same meaning. Both concepts seem to have merged into a more general sense of individual well-being. The linkage of words like "dedication, commitment, and permanence" to words like "love and satisfaction" now seem to have a conditional clause, something like "until love do us part." The religious factor is not seen to be an important dimension of strong marriage relationships (Lauer & Lauer, 1986b).

The religious dimension according to Bibby's (1987) research in Canada, for example, doesn't seem to make much difference relative to other aspects of culture. Based on a cross-national survey in 1985, Bibby found that there were simply no differences in levels of general or marital happiness among either the religious or non-religious. Church life, in particular, was cited as a source of "a great deal" of enjoyment by only 16% of adults and 8% of teenagers (Bibby, 1987). Only 31% of those most "committed" to their faith said they enjoyed their church. Similar findings are reported in the United States (St. George & McNamara, 1984). The processes of secularization seem to be sharply increasing, a process Bibby (1987) calls the Protestant and Catholic exodus. Glenn (ig'87) concludes that the "past three or four decades reflect .... one basic trend, namely an increased tendency for individuals to withdraw allegiance from social groups, institutions, traditional religion, or anything outside of themselves" (p.124). It is in this context that the research in this paper is reviewed. Does religiosity still influence marriage relationships? Is religiosity a significant factor in commitment to marriage? The review of the extant literature is organized into three major sections. The first section does not deal with the religious factor directly. As the major thrust of this paper is the linkages between religiosity and marital commitment, the nature and meaning of commitment in marital relationships is first delineated. The definitional issues in sorting out the differences between marital commitment, marital stability, and marital satisfaction are briefly examined and clarified.

The second section reviews the influence of religion as a social category on marital commitment. Two major religious variables are examined: religious affiliation and religious homogamy. The evidence indicates that religious affiliation and homogamy continue to have a significant impact on constraining married couples to stay together. Even so, the relative importance of these variables, as measured, in explaining marital stability continues to decrease as mainstream predictors of marital relationships.

The impact of behavioral and attitudinal measures of religion on marital commitment are reviewed in the third section. The research on commitment to marriage is organized into three subsections including religious attendance, religiosity, and religion as community. The review indicates that there is a strong relationship between religious commitment and commitment to marriage. These measures are much more powerful than demographic indicators of religion. Again, however, religiosity operates as a major control variable in marital relationships. The linkages to personal measures of commitment in marriage are unclear. These findings are critically reviewed.
and new directions for research are suggested. The concluding section reflects on the context and importance of the religious factor in understanding committed relationships.

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES IN MARITAL COMMITMENT.

"Commitment" has been a major field of inquiry in many disciplines and professions ranging from success in sales, careers, educational achievement, human development, overcoming obstacles, organizational stability, to the linkages between beliefs and behavior (Becker, 1960; Kanter, 1968; Kiesler, 1971; Leik & Leik, 1977). Serious study of commitment mechanisms in relationships and marriage, while of long-standing interest in religion and philosophy, began in the 1970s.

The research on marital commitment often excludes religious variables. Accordingly, these distinctions must be briefly clarified before the linkages with the religious factor can be examined. There are, understandably, several different ways of conceptualizing marital commitment. Several scales of marital commitment have been developed (Clodfelter, 1977; Johnson, 1973; Stanley, 1986; Wyatt, 1983; among others).

There are essentially two major types of marital commitment: personal commitment - a psychological or intrapersonal construct reflecting a personal dedication to the continuation or completion of a line of action (the "want to" in commitment); and constraint commitment - various social or relationship factors which lead to the continuation of a line of action regardless of personal preference (often referred to as the "have to" in commitment).

Perhaps the major problem with this literature is the apparent correlation between marital commitment (whether measured by "have to" or "want to" indicators) and both marital stability and satisfaction. Marriages that stay together, satisfaction notwithstanding, are likely to have a high concentration of structural investments, unattractive alternatives, various social pressures, and investments difficult to lose. It is apparent, therefore, that constraint commitment and marital "stability" are somewhat similar measures. Conceptually, it is viable to define divorce and separation as indirect or outcome measures of lower levels of either structural or personal commitment. Such research seldom includes any direct measures of marital commitment. The linkages between religion and divorce (and related measures of marital instability) are included in the review of literature.

Personal commitment is likewise strongly associated with marital "satisfaction." Persons happy in their marriages are more likely to think "permanence", to invest more of themselves, to give up personal priorities in their partner's interest, and to ignore alternative partners. Goltz (1987), however, has found that personal commitment is a different measure than marital satisfaction. Stanley (1986) likewise argues that the two concepts are distinct. He gives an example of the importance of the distinction: When speaking of a football player's commitment, coaches do not say that Sammy is having a good time playing football, that he is a satisfied football player. They instead say that Sammy always gives 110%; he is a dedicated player. This example highlights the difference between personal commitment and marital satisfaction. Dedication changes one's behavior. Satisfaction may encourage behavior change but such change is wholly dependent on continued satisfaction. Dedication, in contrast it would seem, will define problems as a challenge. The measurement of personal dedication in marriage must go beyond "sticking it out" until death ends the relationship.3
Research on marital commitment remains in its infancy. There is much yet to be learned about the conceptualization and measurement of commitment in intimate relationships. Even so, there is a growing body of literature on the linkages between religion and marital commitment. The next section specifically examines the relationships between demographic indicators of religion and the various indicators of commitment to marriage.

RELIGION AS "SOCIAL CATEGORY" AND MARITAL COMMITMENT.

The study of religious affiliation as a social category has been nearly as popular as social class, education, or ethnicity. Respondents often are asked to identify themselves with one of the major religions in North America (Catholic, Protestant or Jew) and, if Protestant, with a particular denominational group. The stated religious preference or affiliation is then used as a standard background variable. It is apparent that the meaning of this response varies from those with distant Catholic kin to respondents who are active members of a local parish. Even so, the use of religion as a demographic category remains a research staple. The findings are quite consistent.

Religious Affiliation

The categories of affiliation vary from the general categories (Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, no religion) to the denominational and/or liberal-conservative variations among Protestants. Less prominent religions are typically classified as "other." Most of the research relevant to marital commitment deals with marital instability (typically divorce rates).

Catholics and Jews consistently are reported to have fewer divorces than Protestants (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Glenn & Shelton, 1983). Shrum (1980) found that Catholics are 2.2 times more likely to have intact marriages than black Protestants, and 1.8 times more likely than white Protestants. Another study found that Catholics and Mormons have lower divorce rates than either Jews or Protestants (Heaton et al., 1985). Compared to Catholics, Heaton found that Jews have a 10-15% greater risk of divorce, while Protestants, compared to Jews, faced a 25% greater risk.

Variations in divorce rates are also examined among Protestants. Using 1970 data from the National Fertility study, fundamentalist Protestants are found to have higher rates of divorce than both Catholics and non-fundamentalist Protestants (Bumpass & Sweet, 1972; Thornton, 1978). Similar findings are reported in a study by Chi and Houseknecht (1985). Chi and Houseknecht found, however, that the conversion to fundamentalist denominations is the major reason for the higher divorce rate. Among black Protestants, in contrast, conservatives are less likely to divorce than liberal Protestants (Maneker & Rankin, 1987). Booth and White (1980) found that conservative Protestants are less likely to even "think about divorce" than other Protestants. Another study (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) found that evangelical Protestants are more determined to keep working at their marriages no matter how unfavorable the reward/cost ratio. Being reared in conservative and/or fundamentalist denominations, as opposed to the adult conversion of one of the spouses, may well be the major explanation for the seeming contradiction in these studies.

This commitment-like variable also is examined in the Larson and Goltz (1989) study. Structural commitment is found to be the strongest among conservative Protestants, relative to both Catholics and main-line Protestants. Compared to other
religious groups, however, personal commitment is the lowest among conservative Protestants and the variation between husbands and wives is the greatest.

The most thorough examination of the impact of conservative Protestant religion on marital commitment is in the research by Stanley (1986). Two measures are employed: a religious conservatism scale, and a rank scale of conservative groups. Both scales are significantly correlated with constraint commitment measures, and most strongly correlated with the morality of divorce subscale. Religious conservatism is either insignificantly or weakly related to the personal dedication index of marital commitment. Both conservative scales, however, are significantly correlated with three dedication subscales (relationship primacy, couple identity, and sacrifice). These findings clearly underscore the conservative view of marital commitment: it is wrong to end a marital relationship and appropriate to assign priority, even at personal cost, to one's marriage.

In view of the apparent negative correlation between religious affiliation and divorce rates, several researchers have come to see religion as one of the most powerful barriers to marital breakdown. Albrecht and Kunz (1980) found that religion is second only to finances as the major barrier to divorce. In regression analysis, Booth et al. (1985) found that religion, finances and home ownership are the major barriers in explaining thoughts about separation. Bugaighis et al. (1985/1986) also found that religion acted as a barrier in thoughts of separation. In a study of relational commitment (feelings of constraint), religion appears as one of the major 'barriers' to divorce among wives (Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Sabatelli and Pearce, 1986).

Also, several theoretical works on marital dissolution have included religion as a major barrier, i.e. religion is a major cost in weighing the pro's and con's of ending marriage (Edwards and Saunders, 1981; Johnson, 1985; Levinger, 1965, 1976). Kanter (1968), although casting commitment mechanisms in communes in terms of ideology rather than religion, clearly captures the essence of the forces that bind one to the group: sacrifice, renunciation, surrender, and mortification.

Halliday (1980) takes this evidence seriously. He argues that the existing indicators of divorce rates are distorted by leaving the religious population in the denominator. Conservative fundamentalists and evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and religious groups such as Mormons are strongly anti-divorce. He estimates that there are 82 million such Americans and proposes that half of these (41 million) be dropped from the calculations. Cherlin (1980) responds by arguing that the differentials in divorce rates by religious affiliation are much smaller than might be expected from the doctrinal or cultural evidence. He refers to several studies (McCarthy, 1979; McRae, 1978; Sweet, 1973; Thornton, 1975) which indicate that the effect of religious affiliation on divorce rates is declining.

Persons without a religious preference are also more likely to divorce (Nye et al., 1973). Heaton et al. (1985) found that the "no religion" group had a 60% greater risk of divorce, compared to a 25% risk among Protestants. A Canadian study (Fryor & Norris, 1988), based on 1981 census data, found that the divorced and separated are significantly more likely to report no religion throughout the family life cycle. Both female and male lone parents, as well, are significantly more likely to report no religion than wives or husbands in husband-wife families. No religion is strongly related to marital instability, and to a lower commitment to marriage in a study by Booth and Johnson (1988). Lauer and Lauer (1986b) found that couples without a religious affiliation are more likely to be unhappy. Larson and Goltz (1989), as well, report the

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lowest level of both personal and structural marital commitment among the non-religious.

It seems apparent, in weighing the evidence, that religious affiliation remains perhaps the most prominent social pressure in constraining couples to stay together, the quality of marriage notwithstanding. The importance of these findings is even more apparent considering the significant variability in meaning among those who claim "affiliation" within a particular religious group.

Even so, several researchers suggest that the differences between denominations are blurring or becoming less important. Interfaith marriage is, in fact, continuing to increase suggesting that this variable may become a "non-variable" in mate selection (Larson & Munro, 1985; Larson & Munro, in press). Concomitantly, this variable also may be replaced by other factors in the explanation of structural commitment. A viable alternative view, however, is that the measures of religious affiliation must be supplemented by indicators of religious commitment. Much of the explanation for the declining significance of religious preference is that religion and culture are merging. Religious commitment, in contrast, is increasing among those who remain active in their faith, perhaps in reaction to the processes of secularism. The relationships between religious commitment and marital stability and satisfaction must be investigated more thoroughly. Based on the historical importance of the affiliation variable, there is good reason to suspect that greater attention to "cumulative religious commitment" (a la Bibby, 1987) may well reinforce the explanatory power of the religious factor.

Religious Homogamy

The degree of similarity in religious affiliation between husbands and wives, however, also may be a profitable line of inquiry. Research in the fifties through the seventies indicated that intrafaith marriages had lower rates of divorce than interfaith marriages. Jewish-Gentile (Moller, 1975), Catholic-Mormon and Protestant-Mormon (Bahr, 1981), Protestant-Catholic (Bumpass & Sweet, 1972), and religious-nonreligious (Goode, 1956) mixed marriages all have been found to be less stable. Landis (1949) found among mixed Protestant-Catholic marriages that Protestant wives are three times as likely to divorce as Catholic wives. Boekestijn (1963, as reported in Levinger, 1976), based on a study in Holland, found that divorce rates in mixed-faith marriages were nearly five times higher than in same-faith marriages. A couple of studies in the 1970s, however, found no relationship between religious heterogamy and divorce (Chadwick, Albrecht, & Kunz, 1976; Jorgensen & Klein, 1979). Despite these two studies, the overall evidence led two different theoretical scholars on marital stability to conclude that inter-faith marriages are more likely to end in divorce (Nye et al., 1973; Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

Religious heterogamy is significantly related to an attitude measure called "divorce liberalality" in a recent study (Jorgenson & Johnson, 1980). Interfaith marriage remained a significant predictor in regression analysis for wives, but not for husbands. Chi and Houseknecht (1985) likewise found that Catholic wives whose husbands had a different religious affiliation were significantly more dissatisfied with their marriages than were nonCatholics. Among fundamentalists compared to non-fundamentalists, however, religious heterogamy (defined as religious incongruency) was significantly related to marital dissatisfaction. This finding was most apparent among husbands. This relationship was more significant than either race or education.

An innovative recent study of marital happiness (Ortega, Whitt, & Williams, 1988) is worth weighing. Religious homogamy is carefully defined by doctrine, and
denominations are classified accordingly. Intradoctrinal marriages have a consistently higher level of happiness than heterogamous marriages. These researchers also define a doctrinal distance score. Again, the findings are statistically significant: the larger the doctrinal distance, the greater the marital unhappiness. Although the findings in this study are consistent and significant, the explained variation is quite low, suggesting that other factors, such as measures of religious devoutness, need to be combined with doctrinal distance. In the only known study to date on religious homogamy, controlling for religious attendance, and specific measures of marital commitment (Goltz, 1987; Larson & Goltz, 1989) no relationship was found with either personal or structural marital commitment. This particular study strongly supports the conclusion that the more important variable is religious attendance, not interfaith marriage.

In a sense, religious homogamy is a somewhat more elegant variable than religious affiliation in that there is a measure of religious preference from both the husband and the wife. The potential strength of the variable is doubled if religious affiliation itself has any explanatory value. It seems apparent from most of the research reviewed above, that religious homogamy is an important correlate of marital stability and satisfaction among the more conservative religious groups. Similarly, it is an unimportant variable compared to education and other social factors among those affiliated with the more liberal denominations. As the doctrinal distance increases, however, through conversion or casual mate choice (e.g., not carefully weighing the issues in significant differences in values), religious heterogamy is likely to become a strong predictor of marital dissatisfaction and breakdown. The more rigorous the measures of the religious variable, the stronger the linkages between religion and the marital relationship.

The next section reviews the virtue of the above interpretations. Is religious commitment (as measured by religious attendance or degree of religiosity) a more useful variable in explaining marital commitment?

RELIGION AS COMMITMENT AND MARITAL COMMITMENT.

Halliday (1980), among others, rightly argues that religious affiliation and church attendance are unsatisfactory proxies for religious belief. Most religious adherents (those who identify themselves as affiliated with a particular religious group) are unaffiliated in practice and largely uninformed about the nature and meaning of religious faith (Bibby, 1987). In departing from the seeming importance of religious beliefs, Bibby has documented aptly that religious belief is also a frail measure of religious commitment -some 80% "believe," but less than a third are actively involved in religious activity and practice of their "faith." Religious attendance is the primary measure of religious commitment in the current research literature, with somewhat less attention to various measures of "religiosity" or fewer still to religious beliefs. Halliday's (1980) concerns notwithstanding, religious attendance seems a more useful indicator (if only one or two indicators are used) than either religious affiliation or religious belief.

Several theorists (e.g. Levinger, 1976) argue that religious attendance and similar more exacting measures of the religious factor are merely additional indicators of religion as a barrier to leaving marriage. In Levinger's view, while religious interconnections may act as a cohesive force they also limit or restrain freedom of action. A different view is represented in this paper. The study of marital commitment requires an appreciation, in addition to the barrier functions, of both the social support and "stimulus to positive action" functions of religion as commitment.
Religious Attendance

The role of religious participation is apparent in reducing the likelihood of divorce (cf. summary in Kitson et al., 1985; Shrum, 1980). Like-faith couples who also attend church together regularly are less likely to divorce (Chessier, 1957; Goode, 1956; Locke, 1951). Teachman (1982), utilizing an innovative hazards model to predict the likelihood of divorce, compared to couples in stable marriages, couples who obtained a divorce are 1.7 times as likely to be low church attenders. Accordingly, high church attending couples were much more likely to stay together. Religion is the third strongest predictor of twelve significant hazards. The two most powerful predictors of divorce were 1) husbands who are younger than their wives (2.9 times greater likelihood), and 2) couples who are under the age of 17 at the time of their marriage. Glenn and Supancic (1984) found that religious participation (an inverse relationship) is one of three major predictors (the other two are race and age at first marriage) of marital dissolution in seven national surveys.

The relationship between religious attendance and marital satisfaction is less apparent. Glenn and Weaver (1978) found that church attendance was the strongest predictor of marital happiness in their multivariate study. Two recent studies (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Wilson & Filsinger, 1986) show that religious attendance is the single most powerful predictor of marital adjustment, controlling for conventionality (the assumption that religious commitment is an artifact of traditional values). Bahr and Chadwick (1985), however, found a positive but weak relationship. They suggest that it is impossible to sort out the cause. A study by Hunt and King (1978) suggests that the relationship between church attendance and marital adjustment needs review. Church attendance does not have a significant effect when other religious factors are controlled.

Recently several researchers have examined specifically the linkages between church attendance and various measures of marital commitment. In an exploratory study for her Doctoral degree, Kimmons (1980) found a strong relationship to normative commitment (similar in meaning to structural commitment) and a weak relationship to "interpersonal commitment" (similar in meaning to personal commitment). Religious attendance was significantly correlated with personal and structural commitment for both husbands and wives in a study by Goltz (1987). In regression analysis, however, church attendance was only a significant factor in predicting personal commitment among husbands but not among wives (Larson & Goltz, 1989).

The assumption that "individualism" is incompatible with both marital and religious commitment (e.g. Bellah et al., 1985) was tested in a study by Goltz and Larson (1989). As predicted, both structural commitment (for both husbands and wives) and church attendance were inversely correlated with a couple measure of individualism at the .001 level of significance or greater. Nearly 49% of the variation in the individualism index was explained by these three indicators, together with income, education and age. As demonstrated in this study, structural commitment and church attendance are antonyms of individualism.

Long assumed to be the measure of religious commitment, church attendance seems to be a more reliable predictor of marital commitment indicators than demographic measures of religion. Even so, it is apparent that church attendance is a
less salient religious variable than assumed. It is a part of religious commitment, but it is an inadequate predictor variable, in several studies, without being linked to more definitive measures such as those considered in the next two subsections.

Religiosity

Different measures of religiosity are used in assessing aspects of marital commitment. Broderick (1981) used "thought units" in analyzing open-ended responses to "what is important" in marital relationships. Less than 3% of the 152 respondents said religion is important, while the majority used phrases like love, understanding, individuality, sharing, and trust. "Religion" fell into the same category as age and education. Lauer and Lauer (1986b), in their study of 351 couples in long-term marriages, found that religion was considered insignificant in defining the strengths that kept them together. Less than 5% mentioned religion. Most of the respondents defined themselves as religious but considered other factors to be more important. Volunteer "twenty statement" type studies seldom lead to the mention of religion in sorting through the most important sources of marital happiness (e.g. Bibby, 1987).

A scale of religious devoutness, developed by Connecticut Mutual (1981), was used by Scanzoni and Arnett (1987) in a study of marital commitment. Religious devoutness was significantly correlated with marital commitment, love and caring for spouse, and conflict resolution for both husbands and wives. An inverse correlation was found between modern gender roles and religious devoutness. One of the recent pioneer studies of marital commitment (Stanley, 1986) used several different measures of religiosity to examine thirteen indicators of personal dedication and constraint commitment. Stanley's Likert scale of religiosity was strongly correlated with nine of the commitment measures, controlling for relationship quality. Correlations of .28+ were obtained for morality of divorce, meta-commitment, couple identity, and a willingness to sacrifice. Intrinsic religiosity (as opposed to extrinsic religiosity) was also strongly correlated with these same commitment indicators. Both of these measures of religiosity were more strongly correlated with the personal dedication index. The intrinsic religiosity index was not significantly related to the constraint index. Another pioneer study of commitment is now underway (Olson, 1988). Olson uses many exploratory questions to reexamine the traditional concepts of constraint commitment. The focus, however, is on a more comprehensive examination of personal dedication. Many questions were designed to measure commitment choices (intentional affirming and enriching marital behaviors). Preliminary results indicate that the largest number of significant correlations occurred between the religiosity indicators and commitment choices; 93% of all correlations were significant, compared to about 15-30% of all independent variables (e.g. demographic, life satisfaction, socio-economic, and social support). The correlations with constraint commitment indicators support the conclusion that wives, more than husbands, are less willing to put up with unsatisfying marriages regardless of religious commitment. Over half of the sample were actively involved in conservative churches.

The most apparent support for a direct connection between religiosity and commitment is found in the "family strengths" studies (Stinnett, 1979a; 1979b; Stinnett, Sanders, DeFrain, & Parkhurst, 1982). Though the number of significant factors that characterize strong families (and marriages) has varied among the studies, a strong religious orientation and family commitment were systematically present. Schumm (1985), in examining this literature, concluded that religious orientation is a strong influence on the development of family commitment in giving the family a sense of purpose and values oriented to the needs and welfare of others. Commitment, in the causal sequence, is assumed to influence family time and energy (effort). The "religious

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orientation" variable in these studies, however, is reported to have been redefined as a "wellness orientation" in a 1986 workshop on family strengths (Hatch et al., 1986). The Hatch study introduces two important new concepts into the religious commitment literature: spiritual intimacy ("I think that our perceptions of God are basically the same" and "I feel close to my spouse when we're in worship") and emotional intimacy ("I often feel distant from my spouse" and "My spouse can really understand my hurts and joys"). Emotional intimacy was the most powerful predictor of marital satisfaction. Spiritual intimacy and church attendance had no salutary effect on marital satisfaction when emotional intimacy was controlled. As is suggested by the authors, getting people to be more religious may not have any effect on improving marital satisfaction unless change occurs in the nature of emotional intimacy. For a husband to get "religion," for example, is either meaningless or negative unless he learns to give priority to family over work. "For wives, religion did not have so much the power to unite as it did to divide" (Hatch et al., 1986, p. 544).

Beliefs and devotional practices were correlated with marital adjustment in a recent study by Gruner (1985). Gruner found that spouses who prayed and read their Bibles extensively as a way of coping with their personal and marital concerns had significantly higher levels of marital adjustment. The relationships were most significant for Pentecostals and conservative religious groups. In a dated but interesting study, Hillsdale (1962) interviewed couples while they were applying for a marriage license. Hillsdale argued that personal commitment to marriage involves an act of knowing (a cognitive element) and an act of choosing (a cathetic element). Catholic respondents tended to give rote, unreflective comments about the permanence of marriage. Hillsdale observed an "almost-infantile confidence in the medicinal powers of mere communication" (1980, p. 143). In the recent study by Lauer and Lauer (1986a), both happy and unhappy couples gave the same reason for staying together - "marriage is a long-term commitment." According to one out-of-date study, couples who were married in a religious ceremony were less likely to divorce (Christensen & Meissner, 1953). Perhaps this is a modest indicator of follow-through. Though the evidence is limited, it would appear that "religious-like" opinions are a staple in the lexicon of both marital aspirants and long-term married couples. As Lund (1985) argues, the real test may be in the linkage between commitment rhetoric and personal investment (changes in behavior).

Religion as community represents perhaps the most salient accumulation of religious commitment. This variable might be a combination of Bibby's "cumulative" measure of religious commitment and multiple ways of intentional involvement in the "community" of faith. Unfortunately, there is little evidence on the impact of the integration of individual and group in spiritual community. In the Hunt and King study (1978), religiosity takes on new meaning. Credal assent (strong beliefs in traditional Biblical doctrines), involvement in church organizations, a growth and striving orientation, couple agreement on religion, tolerance of others, and an extrinsic religious motivation all were strongly correlated with marital adjustment. These measures outweighed church attendance, although most were active attenders. There is only one study, to my knowledge, that approximates the "community aspect" of religious commitment. Broadbar-Nemzer (1986) examines group commitment among Jewish people. It is argued that the degree of integration into a religious community and its values promotes marital solidarity. Several "communal" measures were used: degree of ritual observance, synagogue attendance, synagogue membership, proportion of closest friends that are Jewish, living in a Jewish neighborhood, travel to Israel, membership in a Jewish organization, and contributions to a Jewish charity. According to Broadbar-Nemzer, these religio-ethnic attributes together promote group cohesion and commitment. Religion is both individual and group-oriented.
As reported in the beginning of this paper, Bibby (1987) found that over 60% of the respondents from Conservative denominations, characterized by cumulative religious commitment (beliefs and practice and experience and knowledge), greatly enjoyed church. Even so, there is little difference in the enjoyment of family life among either the religious "committed" or "uncommitted," regardless of religious affiliation or unaffiliation. Integration into the religious community may be an important variable in assessing marital commitment. Do those who are involved in church committees, deacon and elder boards, visitation teams, or small group Bible studies and fellowships have a deeper sense of religious community? Is the spiritual sense of being part of the "body of believers" (a kind of transcendental "ethnic identity") a way of comprehending religious community? If these deeper dimensions were effectively measured, would the linkages between religiosity and personal marital commitment be more apparent?

The influence of religious commitment on marital satisfaction and on marital commitment is apparent, and on the whole, consistent. Even so, the evidence is not definitive. What might be called "good measures" of religiosity do not necessarily correlate with (or remain significant predictors of) marital satisfaction when other variables are controlled. In the intimacy of the marital bond, the value of the religious factor is subjected to its most severe test. It is here where the "other-centered" message of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) assumes center stage in the drama of real everyday living. As Lund (1985) suggests, the ultimate indicator is whether the deeds square with the words.

CONCLUSIONS

There is considerable research on the relationship between religion and commitment to marriage. The commitment indicators, however, are largely defined by divorce rates and related measures of marital instability. Marital stability is assumed to be evidence of marital commitment. Similarly, marital satisfaction is strongly correlated with a sense of personal commitment. As Goltz (1987) has pointed out, however, personal and structural commitment are different constructs from measures of either instability or satisfaction. The study of personal dedication and constraint constructs in marital relationships is a new frontier in both theory and research. The religious factor appears to be a significant correlate of the marital commitment measures under development. It is likely that improved measures of family commitment will also be strongly connected to a variety of religious indicators. There are several theoretical and empirical matters, however, that require further attention.

1. It is no longer defensible to rely on religion as a category in the study of marital commitment. Although the findings essentially are consistent, religious affiliation is not a measure of religious devoutness let alone religious belief. If religion is to be used as a predictor variable, the measures must approximate the essential nature of religious commitment. Stanley's (1986) measures of intrinsic religion and religious conservatism (this measure transcends denominational and religious categories), the scale of religious devoutness (Connecticut Life, 1981), and measures of religious community (Brodbar-Nemzer, 1986) are preliminary steps. The Glock and Stark (1965) measures continue to be a standard for social science research. Perhaps it is time to rethink this scale in terms of marriage and family issues. The religious factor is more than a barrier to divorce in both theory and in real marriage and family life. The dilemma in both theory and research, however, is that religion both keeps marriages and families together who should have split up years ago, while religion also encourages
others to make weak marriages and families stronger and healthier. Our measures must be able to distinguish permanence for its own sake, and transformational and support mechanisms that improve marriages and families.

2. Johnson (1985) argues that personal commitment is largely a consequence of relationship satisfaction. This may be a viable assumption based on the existing research evidence. Stanley (1986), however, argues that the two concepts are distinct. Stanley's research indeed demonstrated that the relationship between the religious factor and both personal dedication and constraint commitment indicators remains significant controlling for marital satisfaction. Even so, the literature reviewed in this paper suggests that the linkages between satisfaction and personal commitment are significant. Commitment is stimulated in satisfying relationships and, itself, encourages orientations and behaviors that increase relationship satisfaction. It is argued in Larson and Goltz (1989) that personal dedication is the prime "individual and relational source of making good marriages better." Perhaps, but this hypothesis is yet to be documented.

3. Extant indicators developed by Stanley (1986), particularly with respect to personal dedication, need to be tested further in studies of marriage relationships. Indeed, similar scales need to be developed to assess personal dedication in family relationships. The measures of meta-commitment, couple identity, sacrifice, and the morality of divorce seem particularly promising. The "behavior change" dimension of personal dedication (Olson, 1988) may evolve into a useful scale as well. Even so, based on the existing research evidence, it is well to question the usefulness of 13+ subscales to assess personal and constraint commitment in relationships. Are all of the items essential? It should be possible to drop certain subscales, while introducing others that are more important. Scales of this type require far too many questions to be used in standard interviews or questionnaires. Yet, effective and accurate commitment measures are essential in most research seeking to understand and explain marital or family behavior.

4. There is a theological dimension of social science research. In seeking to assess the impact of religious faith in marriage and family relationships, it is essential for researchers to turn to the sacred books for concepts and indicators. The existing theories and measures of commitment do not seem to adequately capture the meaning of commitment as defined in the Bible. Given the prominence of the Judeo-Christian heritage in our society, greater attention must be given to Biblical meanings and assumptions in developing measures. The permanence and fidelity notions are staples in the formulation of religion as barrier to divorce in marriage relationships. Dedication to marriage-affirming and enriching behaviors, however, is also a basic Biblical concept. The measurement of this dimension, whatever the source of such dedication, is essential to more fully explain marital commitment and the religious factor. The "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23), and numerous other action-oriented other-centered Biblical principles, may be amenable to both conceptualization and measurement. It should be possible, once adequate measures are developed, to assess the sequence and linkages of such variables in explaining marital outcomes, both theoretically and empirically.

Until these steps and others are taken, the relationships between the religious factor and marital commitment likely will remain indefinite. If religious commitment is to remain an important variable in explaining human phenomena, marriage and family relationships in particular, more effective ways will need to be found to assess its contribution relative to other indicators that, for now at least, seem more elegant.
Along with several graduate students, I have been involved in the study of marital commitment since 1980. One major study was undertaken in 1980, another in 1984, and a third is now underway.

Bibby (1987:72-73) used a unique measure of religious commitment which he calls "cumulative commitment." Only 20 percent of his sample exhibited positive beliefs (God, Divinity of Jesus, Life after Death), and the practice of private prayer, and the experience of "God's presence", and knowledge of who denied Jesus. These four measures constituted cumulative commitment. Bibby found that 61 percent of conservative Protestants, who were committed to religious faith in this way, enjoyed their church.

Even so, the conceptual linkages between personal commitment and marital satisfaction remain unclear in the literature. Larson and Goltz (1989), for example, found that couples scoring high on satisfaction indicators, had the highest levels of personal commitment. Couples with low satisfaction also had the lowest levels of personal commitment. The experience of satisfaction obviously may well stimulate further satisfying attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, such couples may assume that their marriage is "until death do us part." Satisfaction, however, is often as volatile as "love." As it is the nature of marriage to experience disagreement and conflict, satisfaction would seem to be a more fragile correlate of long-term marital growth than personal commitment. It seems viable to argue that individuals personally dedicated to their marriages will be more steadfast during the rough times (e.g. refuse to monitor the alternatives - Leik and Leik, 1977) or be impelled toward corrective or enriching actions. Larson and Goltz (1989) argue that:

"...the married should behave more equitably and altruistically because they are committed rather than to become committed .... commitment is not the consequence of experiencing a good marriage. Instead, commitment is the individual and relational source of making good (or even weak) marriages better. In this sense, communication is less likely to occur if a couple is uncommitted. Likewise, the resolution of differences (marital adjustment) is less likely to occur if a couple is unable to talk about their differences. Commitment may indeed be the senior variable in the evolution of a strong marriage, from one which is merely 'stable' to one that is becoming more enriching" (p. 397).

Intrinsically religious persons find their primary religious motives in their faith. Extrinsic religious persons see religion as "useful" or as a source of social contact.

Much of the data work for this project remains to be done. Scales and indexes are yet to be developed. A careful and critical review of the data is yet to be done.

REFERENCES


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