

CASE STUDY *continued*

is not as forthcoming from their church as they would like it to be. They continue to face dilemmas. Difficulties at work encourage Jake and Jill to talk together a lot. The children also face issues that are in contrast to what they want to do. They share quality time with their parents to seek support and wisdom. With many successes and failures, the Dosanis continue to grow together as a family unit and enjoy the bonds of love and care that are exhibited in their relationships.

CONCLUSION

In sum, there are clear and important linkages between the five dimensions of religion considered here and various family-related phenomena as shown in the case study.

According to Pankhurst and Houseknecht (2000), the institutions of religion and family interact in reciprocal ways. A vigorous religious system cannot exist without families, who provide members and socialize them into the ways of the faith. Likewise, religion provides families with the symbolic legitimation that validates cultural patterns. In contrast to other institutions, religion and family are both unique in pursuing interests for their own sake, not for instrumental reasons (MacIver, 1970). It is little wonder, then, that they have such a fundamental interconnection in sociocultural life. We hope that this discussion will serve to stimulate further research and critical thinking about the vital, but often neglected, linkages between family and religion.

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION**HOW HIGHLY RELIGIOUS FAMILIES STRIVE TO FULFILL SACRED PURPOSES**

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In this essay, we present a research-based conceptual model that focuses on the processes at work in highly religious families as they strive together to fulfill the

sacred purposes suggested by their faith. Here we contribute to the goal of this volume to “do theory” as well as discuss theory.

Authors' Note: Generous support for the research discussed in this essay was provided to the first author by the Family Studies Center and the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University, and by a sabbatical research leave provided by the BYU College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, and to the second author by the LSU Council on Research. We are grateful to Tom Draper for helpful feedback on a previous draft.

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION *continued***PROCESS: THE MISSING BRIDGE BETWEEN RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS AND FAMILY OUTCOMES**

Little is known about the *processes* that operate between developmental and relational contexts and outcomes. Our research efforts center on qualitatively exploring process-oriented, “how and why” questions. Consistent with the work of both Emmons (1999) and Day (2003) on the importance of goal-oriented striving, our research indicates that religious families have central “sacred purposes” that family members strive together to fulfill. We use qualitative methods to interview families from a variety of religions, races, and geographic locations with a focus on, as Chatters and Taylor put it in Chapter 21, the “lived meaning of religion and family.”

CONTEXTS, PROCESSES, AND OUTCOMES OF FAMILIES STRIVING TO FULFILL SACRED PURPOSES

The figure presented here illustrates a conceptual model of the contexts, processes, and outcomes associated with religious families whose members are striving together to fulfill spiritual goals or “sacred purposes.” The model is based in part on a review of the religion and family literature (Dollahite et al., 2004) and draws primarily on our ongoing research with more than 60 highly religious Jewish, Christian, and Muslim families. Although not exhaustive, the model presents central contexts, processes, and outcomes. Given space limitations, we focus here on processes and make only cursory comments about contexts and outcomes.

Contexts: Spiritual and Religious Purposes and Involvement

Three dimensions of spiritual and religious purposes and involvement serve as contexts for religious families and provide the context

for, or the content of, the spiritual goals or “sacred purposes” that families strive to fulfill:

- *Spiritual beliefs* include religious ideas, ideals, identity, and intentions; a sense of relationship with God; doctrine; sacred meanings; and goals.
- *Religious practices* include sacred rituals and traditions, prayer, study, holy days, rites, vows and covenants, and religion-based abstinence and sacrifice.
- *Faith community* includes public worship, financial and temporal contributions, organizational involvement, offers of service and support, the meeting of faith community obligations, and acceptance of opportunities to be part of something “bigger” than the self and family.

Processes: Families Striving Together to Fulfill Sacred Purposes

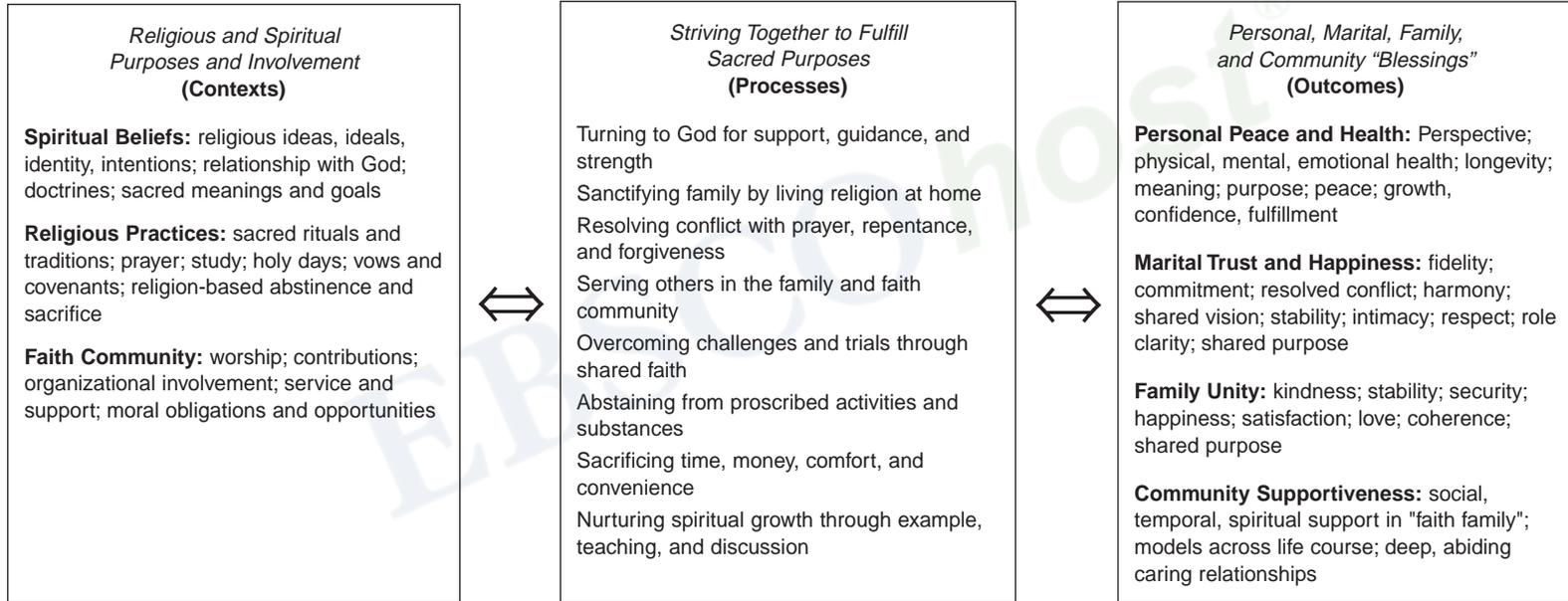
Below we define and describe each process and briefly illustrate it with examples from our interviews with highly religious families.

Process 1: Turning to God for support, guidance, and strength involves looking to and relying on God in ways that are intended to provide aid, strength, and healing to family relationships. Turning to God often includes prayer, reading sacred texts together to understand God’s will, and attending worship services together. Examples from our study include the members of a Catholic family saying the rosary or novenas together, the members of a Muslim family turning toward Mecca to pray in their home, and the members of an Evangelical Christian family reading the Bible together around the kitchen table.

Process 2: Sanctifying the family by living religion at home involves integrating religious ideas and ideals into home and family life so that religion is not confined to a place of worship or a day of the week. Sanctifying the family

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION *continued*

The Contexts, Processes, and Outcomes of Families Striving to Fulfill Sacred Purposes



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also includes creating sacred times, places, and meanings at home by setting aside times in the schedule and places in the home for religious activities, such as Sabbath observances, prayer, and reading sacred texts together, and finding sacred meaning in daily domestic activities. Examples include an Orthodox Jewish family keeping a kosher home to fulfill the Torah, a Jewish mother and daughter lighting the Sabbath candles on Friday evening, a Muslim family observing Ramadan to honor Allah, a Mormon family holding Family Home Evening each Monday night, and an Episcopalian family singing grace each evening at dinner.

Process 3: Resolving conflict with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness involves utilizing religious thought, word, and action to address relational conflicts through praying individually or together, expressing sorrow for actions against God and others, and forgiving others (including family members) for wrongs they have committed. Religious conflict resolution differs from secular approaches in that there is a sense that God expects family members to repent and to forgive. Examples include an African Methodist Episcopal couple holding hands and praying for God to bless their marriage and to forgive them for hurting each other and a Catholic family experiencing a transcendent healing moment while standing together at Mass singing a hymn of forgiveness.

Process 4: Serving others in the family and faith community involves acts of service done by family members (as individuals, in pairs, or as a group) on behalf of others in the family, faith community, or larger community (e.g., feeding the poor, building or repairing homes, working for peace, and working with disabled persons). Examples include the members of a Methodist family working together in a soup kitchen, a Muslim family helping another Muslim family find housing, a Mormon couple working together at a church facility to can food for the poor, and a Jewish family making and delivering treats to neighbors for Purim.

Process 5: Overcoming challenges and trials through shared faith involves family members' attempts to cope with life's adversities through their beliefs, practices, and communities. Consistent with previous research, our work demonstrates that many families rely heavily on religious resources in coping with challenges, and that these resources are subsequently important to their marital and family well-being. Examples include families gathered with others in a prayer vigil after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, a Pentecostal couple getting serious about their religion to help them avoid a divorce, a Jewish family mourning the loss of a grandfather and saying Kaddish each Sabbath in his memory to "keep his faith alive in them," and a Muslim mother and her daughters wearing the *hijab* (head covering) in public in spite of anti-Islamic taunts and threats.

Process 6: Abstaining from proscribed activities and substances involves obeying one's faith's proscriptions against participation in certain activities and ingesting certain substances. Examples include a Muslim family abstaining from alcohol, a Jehovah's Witness family not participating in Christmas or birthday celebrations, a Seventh-Day Adventist family abstaining from meat, a Catholic family not eating chocolate during Lent, and a newly converted Mormon husband struggling to overcome substance abuse and addiction.

Process 7: Sacrificing time, money, comfort, and convenience involves personal or family giving of time and substance for religious reasons, including donation of money, food, clothing, and service. Both the parents and the children we interviewed spoke of various ways they made sacrifices for their faiths and their families and described how this influenced their connections to God and to each other. Examples include an Evangelical Christian family giving time and money for mission work, the children in a Catholic family giving up sleeping or playing soccer on Sunday

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morning to attend services, a Baptist family giving up many of “the nicer things” to contribute more money to their church, a large Mormon family tithing 10% of the family income despite significant economic needs, a Muslim family contributing a significant amount of money as *zakah* to relieve the suffering of the poor, and an Orthodox Jewish family walking several miles to pray at a synagogue on the Sabbath.

Process 8: Nurturing spiritual growth through example, teaching, and discussion involves efforts by family members to encourage spiritual development by teaching religious values, “practicing what they preach,” and engaging in discussions about the nature, meanings, purposes, importance, complexities, joys, and challenges of religious and spiritual issues. Research, including our own, shows that parental teaching, example, and dialogue about religious matters are important predictors of whether children come to endorse the faith of their parents, a major sacred objective for most highly religious parents. Examples include a Jewish family newly committed to Orthodox observance teaching and discussing the challenges and joys of greater religious observance, the members of a Latino Catholic family talking together around the dinner table about the meaning of the rosary and novenas, and an African American Methodist couple responding to their adolescent daughter’s questions about racial discrimination in a congregation. Many of our adult respondents spoke about the importance of “being a good example” for their children.

Outcomes: Personal, Marital, Family, and Community “Blessings”

Here we identify, but do not discuss, four beneficial outcomes repeatedly found in the

literature on religion and family (Dollahite et al., 2004) as well as in our studies:

- *Personal peace and health* includes perspective; physical, mental, and emotional health; longevity; meaning; purpose; peace; and growth, confidence, and fulfillment.
- *Marital trust and happiness* includes increased fidelity, commitment, common values, conflict resolution, harmony, shared vision, marital stability, intimacy, respect, role clarity, and shared purpose.
- *Family unity* includes kindness, family stability, security, happiness, satisfaction, love, coherence, and shared purpose.
- *Community supportiveness* includes social, temporal, and spiritual support in the “faith family”; positive role models for family members across the life course; and deep and abiding caring relationships.

CONCLUSION

Our research indicates that much of religion’s power lies in sacred familial processes that take place primarily out of public view, on “the other six days of the week.” Our work supports and extends the ideas that Chatters and Taylor propose in Chapter 21 concerning the importance of context and process in the study of religion and family as well as ideas from Emmons (1999) and Day (2003) on the importance of attending to the processes that individuals and families use to achieve valued objectives. The processes discussed here represent the largely unconstructed empirical and theoretical bridge between religious contexts and family outcomes. Cogent theory and research aimed at identifying and illuminating processes are needed to complete the bridge.

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