

## ABSTRACT

### Dogmatic Orientations Toward Worldly and Otherworldly Authority

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This study focuses on dogmatic orientations toward worldly and otherworldly authority. Using data from the Baylor Religion Survey, I attempt to identify which social conditions are especially salient in determining authoritarian beliefs and Biblical literalism. In two identical sets of models, I predict the dependent variables using measures of childhood socialization, adult socialization, and images of God. Results show that education, strict upbringing, and Catholic affiliation are among the variables most strongly associated with authoritarian beliefs. Income, concentration of friends at church, and evangelical affiliation are among the variables most strongly associated with Biblical literalism. Of the measures used in this study, images of God as judgmental and engaged stand out for their strong correlations with both dependent variables.

Dogmatic Orientations Toward Worldly and Otherworldly Authority

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Sociology

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Dogmatic Cognitive Style and Beliefs about Authority

Milton Rokeach's *The Open and Closed Mind* (1960) initiated the study of dogmatism as a habitual style of processing information and forming ideas. According to Rokeach, a person is "dogmatic" or has a "closed mind" to the extent that he resists the influence of ideas that fall outside his predetermined intellectual boundaries. Rokeach focused on the process by which individuals organize and develop their beliefs in relation to other beliefs within their "belief systems." When two beliefs within a belief system are intrinsically related to each other, the degree to which an individual allows the beliefs to "communicate" with each other determines the individual's level of dogmatism. Those with open minds demonstrate "intercommunication" of beliefs while those with closed minds demonstrate "isolation" of beliefs.<sup>1</sup> While open-minded thinkers develop their beliefs by considering a variety of related ideas and multiple sources of information, closed-minded thinkers settle on particular beliefs and attempt to shield them from the influence of information that might call those beliefs into question. Rokeach's conceptualization of dogmatism has long been studied in social psychology, and has inspired a resurgence of related research in recent years (Davies

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<sup>1</sup>A consequence of belief-isolation that is useful in illustrating the concept has to do with the logical consistency of various beliefs within a given belief system. While no belief system is posited by Rokeach to be comprehensively logical, it would be more likely for those with isolated beliefs than for those with interdependent beliefs to concurrently hold contradictory views. As an example of this compartmentalization, a person might argue on the one hand that abortion is wrong because of the sanctity of human life and, on the other hand, that capital punishment is a justifiable method for reducing crime. To the extent that this person does not recognize the possibility that the two beliefs are built on incompatible assumptions, the beliefs appear to be isolated from each other. Dogmatic thinkers generally reject the intercommunication and revision of beliefs.

1998; Francis 1998; Altemeyer 2002; Chattopadhyay 2003; Shearman and Levine 2004; Davies 2005; Brown 2007; Crowson, DeBacker, and Davis 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Rokeach argued that the issue of authority becomes all-important for the dogmatic thinker, as sources of authority are able to designate which information should or should not inform already-held beliefs. For dogmatic thinkers, authority becomes a necessary “screening process” for new information. There are numerous examples of such authority. For a given individual, a particular news source might be regarded as an authority, as may a revered teacher, a political candidate, or a religious organization. Because they are highly skeptical of any information that is not already contained in their system of beliefs, dogmatic individuals depend heavily on their chosen information screens. Thus, they place high value on identifying and submitting to dependable sources of authority.

This study is an effort to untangle the social forces that contribute to two similar yet distinct dogmatic orientations toward authority. The first, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), is marked by deference to secular, or “worldly” authority. The second, Biblical literalism, is marked by deference to religious, or “otherworldly” authority. I intend to contribute to three research traditions by a) rendering a more comprehensive image of the dogmatic cognitive style; b) clarifying social factors that contribute to orientations toward worldly authority as measured by RWA; and

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<sup>2</sup> Through extensive trial-and-error, Rokeach developed the Dogmatism Scale (“D Scale”) to determine the degree to which respondents have “open” or “closed” minds. The validity of the D Scale has been the subject of pointed criticism, especially as delivered by Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996, 2002) for the unidirectional wording of the scale items. The current study makes no effort to add to this debate by exposing flaws or highlighting advantages of the original or subsequent scales of dogmatism. Instead, noting that additional improvements in measurement remain, the concept is understood in this study as persuasively modeling a cognitive style associated with consequential beliefs about authority.



c) clarifying social factors that contribute to orientations toward otherworldly authority as measured by Biblical literalism.

### *Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Dogmatism*

In 1950, a group of researchers based in Berkeley published *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford 1950). The goal of the Berkeley study, partly in an effort to understand the rise of Nazism in World War II, was to determine whether a dimension exists in the human personality that is particularly conducive to fascist behaviors. Their work evolved into a more general study of “antidemocratic” tendencies. These researchers as well as many who would follow have used various conceptions of “the authoritarian personality” to depict and understand the degree to which some individuals reject unconditional freedom in favor of firm guidance and conformity. The Berkeley researchers developed the Fascism Scale (F Scale) as a way to predict these tendencies. Although used extensively in the following decades, the Berkeley study’s F Scale has been widely criticized for weak concept validity, tending to measure the content of beliefs rather than a unitary personality structure (Rokeach 1960; Ray 1972; Altemeyer 1981; Eckhardt 1988; Eckhardt 1991). The study has also been criticized due to the authors’ dependence on Freudian assumptions that may be impossible to test (Altemeyer 1981; Altemeyer 1988; Stenner 2005).

Researchers have subsequently worked toward the establishment of more parsimonious and valid measures of authoritarianism than those used in the Berkeley study. Most notably, Bob Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996) has spent decades fine-tuning the RWA scale. This scale is based on his assessment that three attitudinal clusters

most reliably characterize an underlying personality trait. Namely, authoritarians are those who champion a) submission to authority, b) aggressive rejection of outgroups, and c) adherence to conventional values. This convergence of related dispositions is the basis for most of the subsequent research on authoritarianism (For recent examples, see Benjamin 2006; Manuel 2006; Tsang and Rowatt 2007; Wink, Dillon, and Prettyman 2007). In the current study, I use RWA items to capture basic ideological attitudes toward worldly authority.<sup>3</sup>

Each of the major dimensions of RWA can each be traced to dogmatic patterns of thought. First, with regard to submission, Rokeach argues that dogmatists evaluate information based less on its own intrinsic merit and more on allegiance to the source of the information. “[T]he more closed the belief system, the more difficult should it be to distinguish between information received about the world and information received about the source” (Rokeach 1960: 58). The second RWA attitude is aggression. Since dogmatists rely on authorities to guide them to correct beliefs, systems of rewards and punishments become necessary mechanisms. Since they assume that beliefs are to be accepted or rejected rather than developed over time, they express aggression toward groups who, as they see it, refuse to play by the rules. To dogmatic thinkers, those who don’t acquiesce deserve and require punishment. The third RWA attitude, adherence to convention, reduces any need to revise beliefs based on new information. Once belief systems are set, dogmatists are likely to have very little use for information that suggests revision of those systems. The more things “stay the same,” through the maintenance of conventions and traditions, the less are dogmatists placed in a position

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<sup>3</sup> As Sibley and Duckitt (2008) argue in a meta-analysis of literature on RWA and related phenomena, it may be most accurate to characterize RWA as a basic social or ideological attitude, rather than a fundamental dimension of the personality.

of needing to revise their beliefs. In each of the attitudes that make up RWA, then, dogmatic motivations are readily apparent.

### *Biblical Literalism and Dogmatism*

“Biblical literalism” is the conservative Christian belief that every word of the Bible is true, understandable, and should be interpreted word-for-word. According to this view, interpreters of the Bible should reject allegorical readings and look for the plainest, most straight-forward meaning of a given passage. Biblical literalism items are powerful predictors of a wide range of social, political, and religious attitudes and behaviors (Wilcox and Jelen 1990; Grasmick, et al. 1991; Ellison and Musick 1993; Ellison and Musick 1995; Sherkat and Ellison 1997; Doktor 2002; Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005; Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Tuntiya 2005). Despite the vast range of studies that consider the effects of Biblical literalism, however, few studies have attempted to uncover social antecedents of the belief. Likewise, few studies have thoroughly considered implications of the belief for a better understanding of how humans vest authority.

The belief that the Bible should be interpreted literally is indicative of a willingness to be guided by otherworldly authority. Biblical literalists believe the Bible contains what is necessary to know regarding virtually all matters of science, morality, society, politics, theology, and everyday decision-making (Ammerman 1987; Boone 1989; Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996; Crapanzano 2000; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). With regard to each of these spheres of human activity, the Bible is thought to explicitly mediate the will of God, making it the ultimate source of otherworldly authority.

Like RWA, Biblical literalism is conceptually linked to the dogmatic cognitive style. The strategy of a Biblical literalist hermeneutic is not to evaluate interpretations of the Bible based on the perceived intrinsic merit of those interpretations, or in light of information from other sources. Instead, Biblical literalists stress the reliability of scripture as a message from God. In so doing, they eliminate the need to evaluate individual beliefs derived from scripture in light of other beliefs. In Rokeach's terms, their beliefs can be considered isolated rather than interdependent. Simply put, Biblical literalists' choice to unconditionally accept a source of authority as infallible implies a dogmatic limitation on sources of information.

Despite their common cognitive foundation, it should be emphasized that RWA and Biblical literalism are conceptually and measurably distinct. RWA involves the attribution of worldly authority. Biblical literalism involves the attribution of otherworldly authority. While some of those inclined to submit to worldly authority might also be inclined to submit to otherworldly authority, others might reject religion altogether. Likewise, those who maintain deep commitment to the authority of scripture are not constrained to submit to worldly authorities, as is evident in the complex history of Protestant thought on Biblical mandates regarding Christians and secular governments (Knox 1949; Luther 1991; Weber 1993; Troeltsch 1992).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Social Sources of Beliefs about Authority

In the remainder of this study, I will compare the development of these respective orientations by utilizing models that emphasize childhood socialization, adulthood socialization, and images of God.

While the literature on social factors that influence authoritarianism is vast, the literature on social factors that influence Biblical literalism is nearly nonexistent. The following section, then, will concentrate primarily on past studies of social correlates of authoritarian attitudes and will be followed by a brief summary of two of the only studies that examine Biblical literalism as a dependent variable. Although little precedent has been set for examining Biblical literalism as a dependent variable, the authoritarianism literature is rich with efforts to uncover both non-religious and religious correlates and suggests measures that might very well be applicable to both views of authority.

#### *Childhood Socialization: Strict Parents, Childhood Religiosity*

Adorno, et al. (1950) argued that authoritarianism is rooted in individuals' early family experiences. The researchers appealed to psychoanalytic arguments, claiming that most authoritarians suffer early trauma under the dominion of stern, distant fathers. As adults, then, these individuals tend to build up defense mechanisms by aggrandizing their parents and redirecting the resultant repressed hostility at various outgroups. Freudian explanations, however, have been increasingly criticized for being extremely

difficult to verify (Altemeyer 1988; Stenner 2005). A number of early studies found high scorers on authoritarian scales to be more likely to exhibit harsh parenting practices, although these authors could only speculate on the likelihood of the children taking up the trait (Hart 1957; Boshier and Izard 1972; Wilson 1973). More recently, researchers have directly assessed childhood antecedents of respondents' adult authoritarianism. Altemeyer found in multiple studies that authoritarians frequently beget other authoritarians, although he stops short of arguing that this is related to *strict* parenting styles (Altemeyer 1981; Altemeyer 1988). Milburn, et al. (1995), on the other hand, argue more assuredly that harsh parental treatment is a likely antecedent of authoritarianism. Similarly, Stenner (2005) found that having been spanked as a child, in particular, is positively associated with adult authoritarianism. The sum total of research on childhood antecedents of adult authoritarianism suggest that strict upbringing influences adult authoritarianism, although the results are far from conclusive.

Some have pointed to childhood religiosity as another possible source of adult authoritarianism. These researchers typically argue that submission to authority, aggression toward outgroups, and adherence to conventional values are all common features of religious training, and that these values promote notions of authority that are difficult to shed in adulthood. Altemeyer (1981, 1988) found that those in his samples who grew up in religious environments were likely to receive high RWA scores, while those raised in no religion received the lowest scores. Stenner (2005) also found a significant, although small, positive association between religious upbringing and adult authoritarianism.

*Adult Socialization: Racial Diversity of Friendship Networks,  
Church Attendance, Religious Tradition*

A social learning perspective asserts that the nature of adult social bonds and group affiliations will continue to shape views regarding authority, apart from whatever traits may have been established at an early age.

Accordingly, it is plausible that racial diversity within adult friendship networks will influence beliefs regarding authority. This expectation is rooted in Rokeach's (1960) observations on racial prejudice. He argues that prejudicial attitudes are typically justified by appeals to values. Racial minorities are usually discredited not on the grounds of race per se, but because the prejudiced individual believes "they are lazy," for instance, or "they are stuck up." To a dogmatist, who is in the habit of maintaining isolated beliefs, those who appear to possess values incongruent with his own are worthy of contempt. Racism, according to Rokeach, grows out of a refusal to allow intercommunication between an individual's own values and the values he attributes to other groups, and thus rejection based on race may be more fundamentally based on perceived incongruence of beliefs. As Rokeach argues, "If race or ethnic categorizations are important it is primarily because they are convenient symbols that stand for complexes of beliefs which to one degree or another are seen to be similar to and different from our own" (1960: 391). Using Rokeach's logic, it seems likely that as a dogmatic individual's immediate society is increasingly composed of those of different races, the individual will be more likely to recognize the need to either reject or confirm his prior assumptions regarding their values. In other words, increasing diversity in one's immediate society can serve to either soften or harden dogmatic tendencies as preconceived value associations are challenged. In the case of friendship,

which is arguably difficult to maintain if one friend dogmatically rejects the other's values out-of-hand, it seems most likely that racial diversity will soften dogmatic tendencies. Of course, there is another possibility expressed by Adorno, et al., that "closer association with members of minority groups can hardly be expected to influence people who are largely characterized by their inability to have experience... whose structure is such that they cannot really like anybody" (1950: 973). Whether Rokeach or Adorno, et al. are correct on this matter remains unclear, as a potential relationship between racial diversity of friendship networks and authoritarianism does not appear to have been previously tested.

Participation in religious collectives might also account for dogmatic orientations toward authority. Again, this relationship is likely to be driven by individuals' perceptions of the values of those with whom they keep company. As individuals increasingly participate in communities that they perceive as promoting values similar to their own, it is likely that they will increasingly be able to reinforce the borders of fixed, isolated beliefs. Attendance at worship services is used to assess this possibility. A number of studies have attempted to determine the effects of church attendance on authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1988; Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1993; Altemeyer 1996; Stenner 2005; Wink, Dillon, and Prettyman 2007). Consistently, church attendance rates have been positively and significantly associated with authoritarianism. The positive association between church attendance and authoritarianism will be reevaluated in this study in light of other key measures.

Religiosity rarely is found to have a monolithic effect that supersedes the effects of affiliation with particular traditions. It is likely that the discourse and rituals in some



traditions support authoritarian beliefs more than in others, and respondents might be influenced accordingly. A number of studies have examined the effects of religious tradition on authoritarianism. Altemeyer (1981) found that Catholic students reported the highest mean RWA scores, followed in sequence by Protestants, Jews, and unaffiliated respondents; in Altemeyer's Canadian samples, Protestants from "fundamentalist" backgrounds were found to have higher scores than Protestants from mainline denominations. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) found that evangelical denominations tended to report the highest RWA scores, Catholics reported lower scores, mainline Protestants were a close third, and Jewish and unaffiliated respondents reported the lowest scores. Stenner (2005) reported that evangelicals are more likely than other traditions to display authoritarian intolerance. A general pattern emerges in which evangelicals have the highest levels of authoritarianism, followed by Catholics and mainline Protestants, with unaffiliated and Jewish respondents scoring the lowest.

#### *Social Correlates of Biblical Literalism*

Hoffmann and Bartkowski (2008) showed that, especially in more conservative denominations, Christian women are more likely than Christian men to be Biblical literalists. Froese and Bader (2007) used data from the Baylor Religion Survey (2005) to conduct a multivariate regression predicting Biblical literalism. They found that whites are less likely than nonwhites, southerners are more likely than nonsoutherners, and evangelical Protestants are more likely than other religious traditions to be Biblical literalists; they also found that education decreases the likelihood of literalist views, while church attendance, judgmental images of God, and engaged images of God all

increase the likelihood of literalist views. Few other studies have attempted to analyze possible social influences in the development of the Biblical literalist orientation.

*Images of God and Dogmatic Beliefs about Authority*

Froese and Bader's (2007) finding regarding images of God and Biblical literalism presents an intriguing consideration that can be addressed in the current study. Researchers who examine "images of God," or "God concepts," argue that how humans imagine God may be at the heart of many religious beliefs and behaviors (Froese and Bader 2007, Froese and Bader 2009), political beliefs (Greeley 1995; Unnever, Cullen, and Bartkowski 2006; Froese and Bader 2008; Froese and Bader 2009; Froese and Mencken 2009), and fundamental social attitudes (Mencken forthcoming). Images of God are depicted by Froese and Bader (2009) as "metanarratives" that influence the thoughts of individuals from a wide range of religious (or even irreligious) orientations.

Froese and Bader's (2007) study examined two distinct images of God:

*Judgmental God* and *Engaged God*. With respect to orientations toward authority, it is plausible that the metanarrative of a judgmental god would be associated with higher authoritarian attitudes. Such a viewpoint would likely establish in an individual's mind a widely applicable sense of right and wrong, good and evil, rules and obedience. Similarly, an image of a God who is engaged enough in the world to reward obedience and punish rebellion would likely underlie and help justify many authoritarian orientations. With regard to images of God and Biblical literalism, this analysis will revisit Froese and Bader's findings with new data and additional controls. I expect that images of a judgmental God will increase the likelihood of believing that humans need

to submit to rules and established authorities, while images of an engaged God are necessary in order to conceive of this deity putting the thoughts in the minds of writers who thereby plainly communicate correct ways of living and believing. Measures for a judgmental image of god as well as an engaged image of god are added in the third models of each series of regressions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Data and Methods

This study uses data from the second wave of the BRS (2007), a large-scale biennial survey of American values and religious beliefs. The BRS combines fixed content on religiosity with rotating modules on a variety of topics. An item measuring Biblical literalism is part of the survey's fixed content, while authoritarian beliefs are unique to Wave 2. Wave 2 also includes important sociodemographic variables and necessary measures of religious tradition, commitment, and belief. The survey utilizes a mixed-mode sampling design of telephone and self-administered mailed surveys. Wave 2 of the BRS was collected by the Gallup Organization and consists of a random, national sample of 1,648 U.S. citizens. Bader, Froese, and Mencken (2007) explain the methodology behind the BRS in greater detail.

#### *Dependent Variables*

To measure respondents' authoritarian beliefs, I utilized items from the BRS that capture the key attitudes on which Altemeyer bases RWA. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of three statements. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," with "Undecided" in the middle. The first item states "Obedience and respect are the most important things kids should learn." The second states "We must crack down on troublemakers to save our moral standards and keep law and order." The third states "People should be made to show respect for America's traditions." These three items

were analyzed using principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation). All three load on a common factor, for which the factor loading scores are shown in Table 1. The Cronbach’s alpha score is .790. These items were added together to create an “Authoritarian Beliefs” scale with scores ranging from 3 to 15 and a mean of 11.1.

Table 1  
*Factor Analysis of Authoritarian Beliefs*

Belief	Rotated Factor Loading
“Obedience and respect are the most important things kids should learn.”	.839
“We must crack down on troublemakers to save our moral standards and keep law and order.”	.862
“People should be made to show respect for America’s traditions.”	.812

Source: Baylor Religion Survey (2007)

Biblical literalism was measured by asking respondents to indicate which of four statements best described their view of the Bible. Possible responses include, “The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends,” “The Bible contains some human error,” “The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning,” and “The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects.” Although Biblical literalism items are often used as continuous measures that indicate increasing literalism, my focus on dogmatism requires that I keep the fourth option, the “most” literal option, distinct from the others. Thus, I treated the measure as a dummy variable where the most literal option equals “1” and all others equal “0.”

### *Sociodemographics*

Past research on authoritarianism and Biblical literalism suggests a number of sociodemographic controls that should be considered in these analyses.

Income uses the categories \$10,000 or less; \$10,001-\$20,000; \$20,001-\$35,000; \$35,001-\$50,000; \$50,001-\$100,000; \$100,001-\$150,000; and greater than \$150,000. Education was measured as highest grade completed: 8th or less, 9th-12th (no diploma), high school graduate, some college, trade/technical/vocational training, college graduate, and postgraduate work/degree. The other demographic variables include age (in years), as well as dummy variables for race (white=1) and gender (female=1). To account for marital status, dummy variables are included for cohabitation, divorced/separated, widowed, and never married, with married as the contrast variable. Region of the country is measured with dummy variables for East, West, and Midwest; while South is used as the contrast variable.

### *Childhood Socialization*

To address the possibility that strict and punitive upbringings might contribute to authoritarian beliefs, an item is used that states, “My parents often used corporal punishment (such as spanking) as a form of discipline.” Respondent are asked how well the statement applies to them, and five possible responses range from “not very well” to “very well,” with “undecided” in the middle.

Childhood religious socialization is measured with an item that asks, “By your best estimate, how often did you attend religious services at age twelve?” Nine possible responses range from “never” to “several times a week.”

### *Adult Socialization*

To measure the racial diversity of friendship networks, respondents received a score between 0 and 5 based on the relationship between their race and their responses to a battery of items asking about the race of their friends. The races represented are white/non-Hispanic, black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian. Responses include all, most, about half, some, a few, and none. If the respondent reported being of [race x] and answered “all” when asked “How many of your friends are [race x],” then the friend diversity score was coded as 0. If they answered “most” then their score was coded as 1. “About half” was coded as 2, “some” was coded as 3, “a few” was coded as 4, and “none” was coded as 5.

Church attendance is measured by an item asking, “How often do you attend religious services at a church, mosque, synagogue, or other place of worship?” The item is treated as a continuous measure of attendance, coded 1 through 9. Categories include “never”, less than once a year, once or twice a year, several times a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, about weekly, weekly, and several times a week.

The RELTRAD typology (Steensland, et al. 2000) served to distinguish respondents according to religious tradition. Individuals were placed into the categories of evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, black Protestant, Jewish, none, and other based upon their stated denominations. These traditions were then treated as a series of dummy variables. Evangelical Protestants are used as the contrast group because of their relatively high RWA scores in past studies, as well as their consistently strong positive association with Biblical literalism.

### *Images of God*

Respondents' images of God are based on two batteries of questions on the BRS. First, they are asked to indicate their levels of agreement, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with a list of statements about God's character. Second, they are asked how well, from "not at all" to "very well," each of a series of adjectives describes God.

God's judgment is based on summed responses to six items. Respondents were asked whether they agree that God is "angered by human sin" and "angered by my sins;" and how well the adjectives "critical," "punishing," "severe," and "wrathful" describe God. These items were analyzed using principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation). All load on a common factor, for which the factor loading scores are shown in Table 2. The index including all of these items has an alpha score of .855. Scores range from 6 to 30, with a mean of 16.5.

Table 2  
*Factor Analysis of Judgmental Image of God*

Belief	Rotated Factor Loading
God is...	
"Angered by human sins"	.732
"Angered by my sins"	.745
"Critical"	.625
"Punishing"	.833
"Severe"	.814
"Wrathful"	.813

Source: Baylor Religion Survey (2007)



God’s engagement is based on summed responses to seven items. These items, reverse-coded as necessary, include level of agreement with statements that God is “removed from worldly affairs,” “concerned with the well-being of the world,” “concerned with my personal well being,” “directly involved in worldly affairs,” and “directly involved in my affairs;” additionally, respondents were asked how well the words “distant” and “ever-present” describe God. These items were analyzed using principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation). All load on a common factor, for which the factor loading scores are shown in Table 3. The index has an alpha score of .886. Scores range from 7 to 35, with a mean of 28.8.

Table 3  
*Factor Analysis of Engaged Image of God*

Belief	Rotated Factor Loading
God is...	
“Removed from worldly affairs” (reverse-coded)	.677
“Concerned with the well-being of the world”	.872
“Concerned with my personal well-being”	.895
“Directly involved in worldly affairs”	.812
“Directly involved in my affairs”	.864
“Distant” (reverse-coded)	.524
“Ever-present”	.742

Source: Baylor Religion Survey (2007)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### *Authoritarian Attitudes*

Table 4 provides the results from an ordinary least squares regression of authoritarian attitudes on the measures discussed above.<sup>1</sup>

In Model 4.1, increased income and education lead to decreased scores on the authoritarian attitudes scale. Whites report lower scores than nonwhites; cohabitating partners and those who were never married report lower scores than married individuals; and those from the East, West, and Midwest report lower scores than those from the South. Of all the sociodemographic measures, age is the only measure that is positively associated with authoritarian attitudes. Once socialization measures have been added to Model 4.2, education, race, and regional identifiers all remain statistically significant. Of the new measures that have been added, spanking, church attendance at age twelve, and church attendance as an adult are all positively associated with authoritarian attitudes. Increased racial diversity of friendship networks is associated with a decrease in authoritarian attitudes. With regard to religious tradition, Catholics score significantly higher on the scale than do evangelicals, while those who report “other” and “none” score significantly lower.

When images of God are added in Model 4.3, education, race, Midwestern residence, spanking, Catholic affiliation, and non-affiliation all remain statistically

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<sup>1</sup> This model satisfies assumptions regarding error terms in OLS Regression. The mean of the residuals is equal to zero, the residuals are normally distributed, and the residuals are not correlated with any of the independent variables.

Table 4  
*OLS Regression of Authoritarian Attitudes*  
*Standardized Betas Shown with Standard Errors in Parentheses*

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	15.19 ***	13.84 ***	10.80 ***
<b>Sociodemographics</b>			
Income	-.065 (.056) *	-.049 (.055)	-.031 (.058)
Education	-.323 (.049) ***	-.306 (.054) ***	-.268 (.056) ***
Age	.085 (.005) **	.048 (.005)	.075 (.005) *
White	-.052 (.445) *	-.064 (.545) *	-.087 (.589) *
Female	-.016 (.145)	-.033 (.143)	-.030 (.151)
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Cohabiting	-.081 (.345) **	-.043 (.335)	-.041 (.341)
Divorced/Separated	-.019 (.258)	.011 (.252)	.015 (.262)
Widowed	.045 (.324)	.060 (.316) *	.052 (.353)
Never Married	-.059 (.267) *	-.023 (.260)	-.038 (.269)
<b>Region</b>			
East	-.096 (.200) ***	-.057 (.204) *	-.048 (.212)
West	-.151 (.197) ***	-.071 (.200) *	-.056 (.209)
Midwest	-.089 (.197) **	-.093 (.194) **	-.094 (.199) **
<b>Childhood Socialization</b>			
Spanked?	-----	.121 (.071) ***	.096 (.074) ***
Attend at age 12	-----	.051 (.031) *	.016 (.033)
<b>Adult Socialization</b>			
Diverse Friends	-----	-.073 (.077) **	-.044 (.082)
Church Attendance	-----	.108 (.027) ***	.016 (.032)
<b>Religious Tradition</b>			
Mainline	-----	-.001 (.199)	.041 (.205)
Black Prot.	-----	-.001 (.856)	-.019 (.864)
Catholic	-----	.065 (.197) *	.137 (.208) ***
Jewish	-----	-.034 (.481)	.024 (.537)
Other	-----	-.070 (.306) **	-.028 (.312)
None	-----	-.166 (.271) ***	-.041 (.313) *
<b>God Concept</b>			
Judgmental God	-----	-----	.206 (.013)
***			
Engaged God	-----	-----	.139 (.014)
***			
R-Square	.188	.296	.325
N	1387	1291	1102

\*\*\* P<.001 \*\* P<.01 \* P<.05

Source: BRS (2007)

significant. Age is again associated with a significant increase in the dependent variable. Widowhood, racial diversity of friendship networks, both church attendance measures, and “other” status all lose statistical significance. Finally, judgmental images of God and engaged images of God are significant and associated with increases in authoritarian attitudes.

### *Biblical Literalism*

Table 5 presents results from a binary logistic regression of Biblical literalism on the same independent measures used in the regression of authoritarian attitudes.

In Model 1, increased income and education both reduce the likelihood that one will claim to interpret the Bible literally. Whites are less likely than non-whites to be Biblical literalists. Females are more likely than males. Cohabitors, divorcees, and those who never married are all less likely to be literalists than those who are married. Last, those from the East, West, and Midwest are all less likely than those from the South to support a literal interpretation of scripture.

When adding socialization variables in Model 2, income, education, and race are the only sociodemographic controls that maintain statistical significance. Spanking and church attendance both increase the likelihood of interpreting the Bible literally. In terms of religious tradition, mainline Protestants, black Protestants, Catholics, “others,” and “nones” are all less likely to interpret the Bible literally than are evangelical Protestants.

Images of God are added in Model 3. Increased income is associated with a decreased likelihood of Biblical literalism. Whites are again less likely than non-whites

Table 5  
*Binary Logistic Regression of Biblical Literalism*  
*Odds Ratios Shown with Standard Errors in Parentheses*

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Sociodemographics</i>			
Income	.785 (.055) ***	.839 (.068) *	.803 (.077) **
Education	.852 (.055) **	.853 (.067) *	.924 (.075)
Age	.997 (.005)	1.004 (.007)	1.011 (.007)
White	.353 (.372) **	.188 (.608) **	.100 (.736) **
Female	1.539 (.151) **	1.407 (.183)	1.274 (.202)
<i>Marital Status</i>			
Cohabiting	.371 (.413) *	.642 (.479)	.790 (.501)
Divorced/Separated	.469 (.276) **	.570 (.335)	.632 (.365)
Widowed	.862 (.301)	.749 (.374)	.736 (.439)
Never Married	.374 (.311) **	.517 (.370)	.572 (.396)
<i>Region</i>			
East	.370 (.207) ***	.783 (.261)	.881 (.290)
West	.429 (.197) ***	.724 (.247)	.731 (.274)
Midwest	.452 (.189) ***	.647 (.228)	.669 (.245)
<i>Childhood Socialization</i>			
Spanked?	-----	1.212 (.093) *	1.136 (.104)
Attend at age 12	-----	1.025 (.039)	.979 (.043)
<i>Adult Socialization</i>			
Diverse Friends	-----	.990 (.095)	.970 (.110)
Church Attendance	-----	1.295 (.034) ***	1.123 (.040) **
<i>RELTRAD</i>			
Mainline	-----	.165 (.256) ***	.238 (.271) ***
Black Prot.	-----	.122 (.847) *	.050 (.961) **
Catholic	-----	.120 (.263) ***	.173 (.296) ***
Jewish	-----	<.001 (717)	<.001 (502)
Other	-----	.226 (.392) ***	.315 (.435) **
None	-----	.119 (.623) ***	.308 (.787)
<i>God Concept</i>			
Judgmental God	-----	-----	1.038 (.016) *
Engaged God	-----	-----	1.185 (.026) ***
Max-Rescaled R-Square	.134	.406	.452
N	1400	1300	1110

\*\*\* P≤.001 \*\* P≤.01 \* P≤.05

Source: BRS (2007)

to be Biblical literalists. Mainline Protestants, black Protestants, Catholics, and “others” are once again less likely than evangelicals to be Biblical literalists. Finally, both judgmental and engaged images of God are associated with an increased likelihood of Biblical literalism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

These findings suggest that dogmatic orientations toward worldly and otherworldly authority are largely conditioned by different socializing factors. The biggest exceptions to this trend, judgmental and engaged images of God, will be discussed below. First, though, a discussion of the results is warranted.

#### *Correlates of Authoritarian Attitudes*

Increased education reduces scores on authoritarianism in all three models, and is one of the most salient measures used. Although the argument could be made that success in education depends upon and fosters a willingness to follow instructions, reject outgroups, and adhere to tradition, the data evaluated here show education to have a different effect. Most likely, the negative association with authoritarian attitudes is related to the exposure to a wide range of ideas and values that accompany much of the higher education available in the U.S. Those who openly express dogmatic and authoritarian attitudes likely experience a certain amount of stigmatization in such an environment.

Having been spanked as a child proves positive and significant throughout all three models. This is consistent with past findings on the relationship between strict parenting and authoritarianism. Children who are spanked are taught by example a series of principles that could very well develop into authoritarian attitudes as adults.

First, they are taught that certain behaviors are intrinsically good or bad. Further, they learn that their parental authorities are the appropriate arbiters of these good and bad behaviors, and thus obedience is a paramount value. Additionally, they learn that physical punishment is a natural response to rebellion against the guidelines given by their parents. It is easy to see how internalizing this moral system could contribute to authoritarian views in adulthood.

Racial diversity of friendship networks, when introduced in Model 4.2, is associated with a significant decrease in authoritarian attitude scores. Although Adorno, et al. (1950) argued that increased association with minority groups is unlikely to diminish authoritarian attitudes, the data provide evidence to the contrary. Having racially diverse sets of friends likely compels some individuals to realize that hard distinctions and outgrouping based on presumed values often leads to mistaken conclusions. Such realizations would likely weaken authoritarian attitudes. Although this is an instructive finding, the diversity measure does not withstand the introduction of the image of God measures in Model 4.3.

Similarly, church attendance is significant in Model 4.2, but not in Model 4.3. Participation in religious collectives, then, reinforces dogmatic attitudes toward worldly authority. This study's analyses, however, suggest that the mechanism driving this relationship may not be attendance itself. Instead, the relationship might be accounted for substantially by common theological frameworks that are regularly promoted within many churches. In particular, the effect of church attendance may be largely attributable to many churches' promotion of particular images of God.



The effect of Catholic affiliation is also altered when images of God are added. Although non-significant in Model 4.2, Catholic affiliation significantly increases authoritarian attitudes in Model 4.3. These results suggest that there is something about the Catholic experience uniquely compatible with authoritarian beliefs. Considering that evangelicals are known to be comparably conservative on many moral issues (Steensland et al. 2000), it doesn't appear to be the case that conventionalism is the factor that propels Catholics in the direction of higher authoritarianism. Another possibility is that the Catholic Church's hierarchical structure and emphasis on institutional grace foster a sense in many Catholics that submission to authority is inherently rewarding. Thus, organizational structure and institutional dogma may have a strong effect on the attitudes of individuals within the organization. These differences between Catholic and evangelical governance and soteriology may be instrumental with regard to their contrasting levels of authoritarianism.

Images of God as judgmental and engaged prove to be powerful predictors of authoritarian beliefs. Those whose lives are guided by the metanarrative of a God who demands obedience tend to expect others to live within a framework of subjection, punishment, and conformity. Likewise, if individuals imagine God as engaged in the world and in individuals' lives, they see little sense in making up the rules as they go along. Describing the moral absolutism of those with judgmental and engaged images of God, Froese and Bader (2009) point out that they may operate according to what Lakoff (2002) calls a "strict father morality." In Lakoff's model, a strict father provides clear moral guidelines and, when necessary, will punish children who deviate from those guidelines in order to protect them and teach them how to survive a dangerous

and evil world. Those who imagine a strict God imagine a wider universe where rewards and punishments are necessary and highly moral.

### *Correlates of Biblical Literalism*

In the Biblical literalism model, measures of religious identification and religious socialization are prominent.

Sociodemographic measures of income, education, and gender do appear to play an important role, however. Income negatively predicts Biblical literalism even after all of the religious measures have been added in Model 3, possibly indicating that the guidance of religious authority is particularly appealing to those with greater material needs. Females are more likely to be Biblical literalists, a finding that is consistent with Hoffman and Bartkowski's (2008) study utilizing the General Social Survey. As was the case with authoritarian attitudes, education negatively predicts Biblical literalism. This finding supports a sense that educational institutions generally encourage independent evaluation of multiple sources of information and discourage dependence on any single source. Although both gender and education are strongly related to literalism, both become nonsignificant once images of God are added to the model.

Regarding the religious socialization measures, church attendance and Evangelical affiliation both increase the likelihood of interpreting the Bible literally. These findings speak especially to the importance of religious cultures in the development of the belief.

As was true in analysis of authoritarian attitudes, the relationships between images of God and Biblical literalism and Biblical literalism are robust. Only a God who favors judgment would be likely to give people a clear set of rules to follow.

Similarly, a God who takes an active role in the world's affairs is the kind of god that would write a text telling humans everything they need to know.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

I attempted in this study to locate social forces involved in the development of two attitudes regarding authority. The first, RWA, relates to worldly authority. The second, Biblical literalism, relates to otherworldly authority. Both attitudes are based in a dogmatic cognitive process in which “closed-minded” individuals rely on authority to screen and evaluate information.

Analysis demonstrated that authoritarian attitudes and Biblical literalism are related to distinct sets of socializing forces. Authoritarian attitudes are associated with level of education, having been spanked as a child, racial diversity within networks of friends, and Catholic affiliation. Biblical literalism is associated with income, education, gender, church attendance, and evangelical affiliation. What authoritarian attitudes and Biblical literalism have most in common, however, are similar relationships to images of God. These dogmatic orientations are tied to an elemental understanding of what God is like. This theological metanarrative is conspicuously related to how individuals think about what sources to trust and how much to trust them. As God is increasingly conceived as a judge, or as engaged in the world, individuals increasingly favor authoritarian attitudes. Similarly, as God is increasingly conceived as judgmental of and engaged in the world, individuals are more likely to believe that the Bible should be interpreted literally.

Although some of the effects of dogmatic attitudes toward authority have been alluded to in this study, the focus has been more on the attitudes' possible sources. Ever since Adorno, et al.'s 1950 study, research on authoritarianism has focused on understanding how personality and ideological social attitudes shape unquestioning acquiescence to those in power. These studies often assume that a critical assessment of authorities' intentions is a desirable democratic function, especially in light of despotic atrocities well known in recent history. This study is an effort to contribute to this research tradition by developing a more complete picture of the cognitive and social forces that contribute to the shape of authoritarian dispositions.

The effects of Biblical literalism have also been alluded to. I should point out that these effects are not necessarily related to any of the Bible's actual content. In fact, I have taken it for granted that a literal interpretation of all of scripture is impossible. As studies in hermeneutics have shown, any text must be filtered through experience, language, and assorted prejudices before readers can interpret given passages, and readers invariably disagree on even the most fundamental matters of interpretation (Gadamer 1989; Bartkowski 1996; Sherkat and Ellison 1997; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). Biblical literalism has been effectively studied as a "cultural schema" or "core interpretive framework" (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008) that shapes ideologies within some Christian communities. I have attempted to better understand this interpretive framework by showing how it is fostered by various socializing forces.

In *The Open and Closed Mind*, Rokeach posited a "cognitive liaison system" that directs individuals in their decision to invest trust in various sources of authority. He describes such a system as a necessary mediator "between the person and the world

th[e] person is trying to understand” (43-44). The liaison system models the process through which an individual filters received information through selected sources of authority in order to arrive at opinions and beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Put differently, cognitive liaison can be understood as a set of beliefs about who to believe. In his conclusion, then, Rokeach pointed to the need for a closer examination of the “meta-beliefs” that provide cognitive liaison (409). This study finds that images of God are centrally associated with both religious and non-religious views on authority, and as such they may be central in the liaison systems discussed by Rokeach. Along with a number of important factors of human socialization, images of god shape cognitive processes that have wide ranging social consequences.

A few directions for future research can be derived from the current study. First, studies should explore further the relevance of images of God to beliefs about authority. Apart from RWA and Biblical literalism, other intellectual allegiances could be examined including those given to charismatic figures, hierarchical organizations, education sources, and media outlets. Patterns connecting specific images of God to specific patterns of subjection could be beneficial in better understanding the shape of popular discourse, ideologies, and social movements.

Second, additional studies might benefit from oversampling groups that were somewhat underrepresented in the BRS sample. Nonwhite respondents, for instance,

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<sup>1</sup>Such a system, he argues, is necessary to all individuals (not just those high in authoritarianism) as they attempt to process information into coherent beliefs. He writes, [W]e may... define authority as any source to whom we look for information about the universe, or to check information we already possess. Of course, people differ in the kind of authority they depend on for information. A person said to be high in authoritarianism does not differ from a person said to be low in authoritarianism because the first relies on authority and the second does not. Rather, they have different ideas about the nature of authority, different theories about the way to employ authority as a “cognitive liaison system”... (1960: 43)

were positively associated with RWA and Biblical literalism. While this is important information, a larger sample of nonwhite respondents would help to confirm the finding and allow for a more thorough discussion of the relationship between race and orientations toward authority. Similarly, a greater number of black Protestant and Jewish respondents would provide more comprehensive insight into the impact of religious tradition.

Finally, while dogmatic thinkers display a greater adherence to certain sources of authority, it would be useful to more fully model the belief systems of non-dogmatic thinkers. While open-minded thinkers can confidently be considered to hold beliefs less rigidly, that is certainly not to say that they do not have beliefs. How do these more flexible thinkers translate received information into beliefs and opinions? One possibility would be that “open-minded” individuals have a broader range of “authorities” from which to choose, as opposed to overreliance on any single source. If this is the case, though, how do they select from the multiple options in a given situation, and how do they resolve conflicts when their various sources of authority would seem to disagree? An adequate understanding of this and related questions might be more fully developed through continued investigation of the relationship between cognitive style and orientations toward authority.

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