

THE DYNAMICS OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

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Abstract: In the sociological landscape where religion is often reduced to merely an administrative instrument for the legality of marriage, the phenomenon of religious conversion frequently loses its spiritual essence. This study explores the complex psychological dynamics involved in pragmatic conversion, a form of religious conversion in which the shift in belief occurs not due to a transcendental calling, but rather because of situational pressures and rational calculations. Using a qualitative case study approach on a subject who experienced a cycle of conversion (from Islam to Christianity) and re-conversion (returning to Islam), this research examines the individual's inner turmoil through the lens of Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory. The findings reveal that religious uniformity as a prerequisite for marriage often creates a condition of "compliance without acceptance." The subject demonstrates high levels of orthopraxic behavior such as diligently attending church services yet simultaneously experiences a profound conflict with their essential identity, which remains attached to their previous creed, ultimately triggering a loss of inner peace. Interestingly, this analysis highlights that when the external buffering variable (marriage) collapses due to conflict, the justification for maintaining such dissonance also disappears. The decision to return to the original religion, therefore, is not merely an inconsistency of attitude, but rather a mechanism for restoring mental homeostasis and a rational effort to reduce the psychological suffering caused by living in theological pretense.

Keywords: pragmatic conversion, cognitive dissonance, interfaith marriage

I. INTRODUCTION

In the discourse of the psychology of religion and sociology, religious conversion is often placed in a sacred position. It is portrayed as a *metanoia*—a radical transformation of life orientation, a "rebirth," or a spiritual turning point in which an individual discovers a new system of meaning that transforms their existence entirely. Classical narratives of conversion usually center on mystical experiences, intellectual enlightenment, or a pure (intrinsic) transcendental calling. However, when this phenomenon is brought down from the theological sky to the sociological ground—particularly within societies that position religion as a rigid marker of public identity—conversion becomes a far more complex, political, and often traumatic phenomenon [1].

This complexity reaches its peak when religious conversion intersects with the institution of marriage. In many jurisdictions, including Indonesia, religious uniformity often becomes an absolute prerequisite for the legal and social legitimacy of a marriage. In this context, religion is no longer merely a private space for dialogue between human beings and the Creator, but rather transforms into an administrative instrument and a condition for social negotiation. Individuals involved in interfaith relationships are frequently confronted with a brutal existential dilemma: choosing loyalty to the faith they have inherited and believed in, or preserving their interpersonal relationship with their partner.

When the choice falls on the second option changing religious affiliation to facilitate marriage what occurs is what

the sociology of religion literature refers to as *pragmatic conversion*. This is a shift in belief driven not by internal spiritual impulses, but by external pressures and rational calculations aimed at achieving a worldly objective, namely a legally recognized marriage [2]. In this scenario, religion is reduced functionally to an "entry ticket" for social acceptance and state legality. However, a crucial question then arises: does a change in administrative status on paper automatically lead to cognitive and emotional transformation within the individual?

It is at this point that the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957, becomes highly relevant [3]. This theory offers a precise framework for examining the psychological turmoil experienced by individuals who undergo pragmatic conversion. Festinger assumes that humans possess a strong internal drive to maintain consistency (homeostasis) among their cognitive elements—namely knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. When a discrepancy occurs between what a person believes and what they do, a state of uncomfortable psychological tension emerges, known as dissonance.

In the context of pragmatic conversion for the sake of marriage, cognitive dissonance is not merely a possibility but almost an inevitability. The individual consciously performs new religious behaviors (*orthopraxy*)—such as undergoing baptism, reciting the *shahada*, or participating in regular worship—to meet the expectations of their partner and social norms. This constitutes the behavioral element. However, on the other hand, their cognitive and emotional structures—which

contain theological doctrines, cultural memories, and loyalty to their original religion—remain strongly tied to their former identity. As a result, a sharp collision occurs between “who I am in public” (performative identity) and “who I am within” (essential identity) [4].

This tension often manifests in the form of existential anxiety, feelings of guilt, and even a sense of hypocrisy. An individual may physically attend a new place of worship, yet mentally experience rejection. Worship, which should function as a medium of transcendence, instead becomes a stage of painful performance. This condition explains why many individuals who undergo pragmatic conversion report a loss of “peace of mind” or *inner peace* [5]. This uneasiness is not merely a momentary melancholic emotion, but rather an alarm signal from the psyche indicating a fracture within the integrity of the self.

Within the dynamics of religious conversion, the phenomenon of “compliance without acceptance” often occurs, in which individuals adhere to the rules of the new religion in order to maintain marital harmony, even though they do not internally accept the truth of its teachings. In the short term, this dissonance may be rationalized with justifications such as “sacrifice for love” or “family responsibility.” However, according to Cognitive Dissonance Theory introduced by Leon Festinger (1957), a dissonant state cannot be sustained indefinitely, and the accumulated psychological pressure will eventually demand resolution. When it reaches a critical point, individuals often return to their original religion as a mechanism for restoring mental homeostasis [6][7][8].

This manuscript aims to examine these dynamics in depth through the empirical narrative of a subject who experienced a cycle of conversion and reconversion. This case study serves as a window for understanding how religious identity built upon pragmatic foundations is often fragile. When the external variables that support such conversion disappear—for example, divorce, the death of a spouse, or marital conflict—the justification for maintaining that dissonance collapses instantly.

In many cases, including the one analyzed in this study, the resolution to this dissonance is a return to the original religion (*re-conversion*). This act of returning should not merely be viewed as an inconsistency of attitude, but rather as an effort to restore mental health. By realigning religious practice with core beliefs that never truly disappeared, the individual reduces dissonance and restores coherence to the narrative of their life.

Why is this analysis important? First, it challenges the common assumption that marriage-related conversion represents the end of a spiritual journey. On the contrary, such conversion often marks the beginning of a long and silent psychological struggle. Second, this study provides critical insight into the psychological impact of rigid state regulations on citizens’ personal lives. When the law enforces uniformity, it indirectly creates space for superficial compliance and hidden psychological suffering behind marriage administration documents.

Through an in-depth exploration of “inner unrest” as a clinical symptom of identity struggle, this article seeks to contribute theoretically to the literature on the psychology of

religion while also offering a humanistic perspective for understanding the phenomenon of religious conversion in Indonesia. It is hoped that this more nuanced understanding can open space for a more empathetic discussion about how individuals navigate the intersection between love, law, and God.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

a. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interview methods to explore the experiences of individuals who undergo religious conversion in interfaith marriages. The subject of this research consists of one couple who has experienced a process of religious conversion. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena, particularly in comprehending social phenomena comprehensively by exploring meanings, mindsets, rationality, perspectives, and individual experiences. John W. Creswell (2017) states that qualitative research methods are used to explore and understand the meanings constructed by individuals or groups that are considered to originate from social or humanitarian problems [9].

The research design used in this study is a case study, which refers to a series of scientific activities conducted intensively, in detail, and in depth regarding a program, event, or activity involving individuals, groups, institutions, or organizations in order to obtain a deep understanding of the event. Usually, the selected event—later referred to as a case—is an actual, real-life event that is currently occurring rather than something that has already passed [10].

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews designed to explore the respondents’ experiences, motivations, influencing factors, and challenges. The interview results were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify relevant themes based on individual experiences. This study also considers ethical aspects, including obtaining informed consent from the subject before conducting the interview and maintaining the confidentiality of the participant’s identity and the data obtained. The purpose of this research design is to provide an in-depth understanding of the experience of religious conversion in interfaith marriage and its implications for the individual’s social and spiritual life.

b. Research Subject

The subject of this study is an individual with the initials DL, a 26-year-old father who has been Muslim since birth. DL grew up in the city of Medan, where the social environment is predominantly Christian. This environment made the subject quite familiar with Christianity, since most of his friends at that time were Christians. The subject also had an interest in learning about Christianity because his grandmother was a Christian, which led him to often celebrate Christmas with his family. However, throughout his life, his parents consistently taught him Islamic teachings, including how to perform worship and behave in accordance with Islamic law.

As he grew older, the subject moved to Jakarta in 2020 and entered into a relationship with a girlfriend who was Christian. After being together for two years, his girlfriend

became pregnant, which caused the subject to panic and seek advice from his father. Considering the responsibilities involved, the subject decided to convert to Christianity and got married in 2022.

As a Christian, the subject diligently attended worship services and participated in spiritual guidance activities. However, he never informed his mother about this change because he was afraid of disappointing her. Although he actively participated in Christian worship, he felt an inner unrest that was different from what he experienced when he was Muslim. The subject also consulted a pastor, but he still tried to adapt to his new religion.

After experiencing this sense of unease for six months, the subject eventually decided to return to Islam, believing that his previous decision had been a mistake. After undergoing the process of re-conversion, the subject finally felt inner peace again and became convinced that he was on the right path.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview results, three main themes were identified that shape the narrative of the subject's life journey: (1) the initial motivation for conversion, which was pragmatic and multifaceted; (2) post-conversion religious practices characterized by sincerity but accompanied by inner conflict; and (3) triggers for reconversion rooted in the breakdown of interpersonal relationships and the renewed search for spiritual identity.

a. Initial Motivation for Conversion: The Intersection of Pragmatism and Personal Openness

The main finding indicates that Subject D's initial decision to convert from Islam to Christianity was not driven by a single factor, but rather resulted from an intersection between pragmatic demands and personal openness toward another faith. The most urgent triggering factor was his partner Shalom's pregnancy. The subject stated, "...initially because of Shalom, at that time Shalom was pregnant and I was raised by my father to be responsible, so I thought it was okay for me to convert to Christianity." This statement highlights a strong sense of personal responsibility that became the primary justification for the subject to take such a major step.

However, this decision was also moderated by the subject's background, which was not entirely unfamiliar with the Christian environment. He grew up in Medan within a predominantly Christian social environment, and even his grandmother celebrated Christmas, which made him feel that he was "not completely unfamiliar with this religion." This openness, combined with his admiration for a Christian musician who could express faith through music in what he perceived as a simple and direct way to God, provided a kind of permissive foundation for his decision.

Interestingly, the subject rejected the assumption that his decision was purely due to his partner's pregnancy. He claimed that he would most likely have converted anyway in order to marry Shalom, even if the pregnancy had not occurred. This indicates a combination

of situational pressure (pregnancy) and relational commitment (the desire to marry) underlying his decision.

b. Post-Conversion Religious Practice: Efforts of Integration and Inner Conflict

After converting, Subject D demonstrated a high level of seriousness in practicing his new religious beliefs. He did not merely fulfill formal requirements but actively participated in church life. The subject explained, "...I even attend worship every week and never skip it; I invite Shalom and Eld, my child, to worship together." In addition to weekly worship, he also routinely conducted morning spiritual reflections before going to work with the hope of receiving blessings. This commitment reflects a sincere effort by the subject to integrate himself into his new faith and community.

However, behind these devout religious practices, the subject experienced deep and persistent inner conflict. He felt a lack of peace ("not calm") every time he worshipped, even though he continuously prayed for tranquility. This feeling was described as a "burden" or something that did not feel right in his heart. According to his confession, the source of this anxiety was strongly rooted in the religious upbringing he had received since childhood. He explained, "...we can't lie, since childhood we've been taught Islam, so when doing something outside of Islam it feels very wrong."

This sense of guilt gradually evolved into existential questions about his own identity ("this is not me, what am I doing?") and the truth of the path he had chosen. The conflict between his actions (practicing Christianity) and his core identity (someone raised within Islam) became the foundation of the fragility of his spiritual commitment.

c. Triggers of Reconversion: The Breakdown of Relationships and the Search for Identity

The main trigger that ultimately undermined the subject's commitment to his new religion was the change in Shalom's behavior, such as her habit of clubbing and neglect in caring for their child, which caused further inner turmoil for the subject. The inability to reach mutual understanding and Shalom's unilateral decision to end the relationship became a turning point for him.

The subject used a powerful metaphor to describe his situation: "...it's like your religion is a house, and Shalom and Eld are the pillars of that building. When the pillars collapse, I also become weaker both in faith and in life." This metaphor reveals that the Christianity he practiced functioned as a "house" built upon the foundation of his relationship with his family. When those supporting "pillars" collapsed, his motivation to remain within that "house" also disappeared.

His enthusiasm for worship, which was largely intended to pray for his family, eventually faded. Thus, his decision to return to Islam was not only driven by inner unrest but was also accelerated by the loss of the social and emotional anchors that had previously supported his new identity.

1. The Intersection of Pragmatism and Social Permissiveness: A Fragile Foundation

Religious conversion, in contemporary academic discourse, can no longer be simplistically reduced to a mere administrative change on an identity card or an isolated transcendental quest. As emphasized by Lewis Rambo (1993) in his processual model, conversion is a highly dynamic, dialectical, and contextual phenomenon. Such events never occur within a *sociological vacuum*; rather, they are deeply embedded within a matrix of social situations, cultural pressures, and personal crises that surround them.

A critical analysis of Subject D's narrative reveals a complex phenomenon in which the decision to undertake a theological migration from Islam to Protestant Christianity did not emerge from what scholars often describe as a *spiritual quest*—an active search for existential meaning or intellectual dissatisfaction with prior religious dogma. Instead, the conversion functioned as an adaptive mechanism responding to a crisis situation (an out-of-wedlock pregnancy) and the moral imperative imposed by a familial authority figure. This study aims to dissect these dynamics using Gordon Allport's Religious Orientation Theory, Peter Berger's concept of the Plausibility Structure, and Rational Choice Theory in order to understand how a pragmatically grounded conversion may later generate acute cognitive dissonance.

Tracing the fundamental motivations of Subject D clearly shows that his decision was driven by highly pressing external factors. His partner's pregnancy and the doctrine of "responsibility," authoritatively instilled by his father, became the primary catalysts that compelled the change in religious identity. From the perspective of the psychology of religion, this phenomenon can be precisely explained through the Religious Orientation Theory proposed by Gordon Allport and Ross (1967).

Allport distinguished two contrasting poles of religious orientation: intrinsic and extrinsic. An intrinsic orientation places religion as the primary framework of meaning (*master motive*), in which individuals internalize and "live" their religion. In contrast, an extrinsic orientation—strongly reflected in Subject D's narrative—views religion in a utilitarian manner. In this context, religion is adopted not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve pragmatic social goals.

For Subject D, Christianity functioned as an administrative bridge to legitimize his marriage and restore the moral order of the family threatened by the stigma of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Borrowing the terminology of Lofland and Stark (1965), this conversion more closely resembles situational adjustment rather than a genuine spiritual transformation. The latent danger of this dominant extrinsic orientation lies in the fragility of theological commitment. Because the foundation of conversion is built upon temporary social needs (marital legality), once those needs are fulfilled—or conversely threatened (such as through marital conflict)—the relevance of the new religion may collapse. This becomes the initial seed of cognitive dissonance, a mental tension explained by Leon Festinger (1957) arising from inconsistency between behavior (new rituals) and belief (old faith).

The pragmatic decision to change religions, regardless of its urgency, could not have materialized smoothly without sufficient sociological support. In the case of Subject D, this theological transition was facilitated by what sociologist Peter L. Berger refers to as a Plausibility Structure. Berger argues that every belief system requires a social base in order to remain "reasonable" and acceptable to the individual.

Subject D's upbringing in the pluralistic environment of Medan becomes a crucial variable in this analysis. Intensive interfaith interactions as part of everyday life, along with the presence of a significant family figure (his grandmother) who celebrated Christmas, formed what might be called a "permissive foundation." In Lofland and Stark's conversion theory, this ecological factor reduces cultural alienness. Psychological barriers that might normally be experienced by a Muslim entering a church or hearing Christian liturgy were minimal because such symbols had already been familiar within the subject's cultural memory since childhood.

This inclusive environment functioned as a cognitive bridge, enabling the subject to rationalize his decision not as a "total betrayal" of his former identity but rather as a reasonable sociological adaptation. However, this social accessibility became a double-edged sword. It facilitated entry but did not guarantee depth of commitment. The subject entered the new religion without undergoing profound theological struggle, causing the roots of his new belief to spread only on the sociological surface rather than penetrating deeply into essential spiritual consciousness.

Another supporting factor emerging in the narrative is the aesthetic appeal of contemporary liturgy. The subject expressed appreciation for worship songs that offered a more fluid, emotional, and accessible spiritual experience compared with the structured and formalistic worship of his previous religion. This phenomenon aligns with William James's observations in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where elements of feeling and aesthetics often function as effective entry points for religious experience even before doctrinal understanding develops.

However, critical analysis reveals that this aesthetic appreciation was merely a superficial layer—a psychological "sweetener." The subject's narrative consistently confirms that the single determining variable behind his conversion was relational commitment to his partner, Shalom. His statement that he would still convert for the sake of marriage—regardless of the pregnancy—highlights the extremely instrumental nature of his new faith.

Within the framework of Rational Choice Theory applied to religion by Stark and Finke, Subject D conducted a cost-benefit calculation. The "cost" of leaving Islam (social sanctions, theological discomfort) was perceived as lower than the "benefit" of marrying Shalom (love, family, fulfillment of responsibility). Theology was subordinated to biological and sociological needs. Christianity, in the subject's cognition, was reduced to merely a state administrative requirement to legitimize love.

This condition became a perfect incubator for Cognitive Dissonance. Festinger explains that dissonance arises when painful inconsistencies exist between cognitions and behavior. Subject D performed Christian rituals (attending

church, singing, praying), yet his core cognition remained tied to his former identity or at least did not fully accept the new doctrine as absolute truth. The “uneasiness of the heart” later reported by the subject was the psychological manifestation of this conflict: his body was present in church for the sake of human love, but his soul cried out due to the absence of intrinsic faith in the God he worshipped.

2. Dissonance in Orthopraxy: The Gap Between Ritual and Inner Belief

In the psychological trajectory of converts—particularly those who change religions for pragmatic reasons such as marriage—the post-conversion phase often becomes the quiet yet destructive battlefield of inner conflict. Analysis of Subject D reveals a phenomenon that can theoretically be categorized as orthopraxy without orthodoxy. This term refers to a condition where strict adherence to religious rituals (orthopraxy) exists without genuine acceptance or belief in the underlying theological doctrines (orthodoxy).

Phenomenologically, the subject succeeded in constructing a new identity that appeared solid on the surface. His behavioral discipline was remarkably high: regular participation in weekly liturgy, initiating morning spiritual reflections, and actively guiding his family to attend church. These behaviors created a convincing social façade suggesting that the subject was a devout Christian.

Yet this visible compliance stood in stark contrast to the psychological turmoil occurring beneath the surface. Behind the seemingly perfect ritual performance lay intense and persistent cognitive dissonance that eroded his mental well-being.

Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains this condition clearly. Individuals possess an innate drive to maintain cognitive consistency. Dissonance occurs when a person holds two conflicting cognitions, or when behavior contradicts belief.

The subject reported an absence of inner peace and a constant sense of psychological discomfort whenever he participated in religious worship. This was not merely emotional unease but the clinical manifestation of dissonance. His behavior (worshipping Jesus, singing praise, praying within the Christian tradition) collided with internalized cognitive elements derived from Islam, particularly the doctrine of Tawhid, which strictly prohibits associating partners with God, along with the social and theological stigma attached to apostasy.

Because these cognitive elements relate to eternal salvation and fundamental identity, the magnitude of dissonance became extremely high. The subject lived in a state of chronic mental tension, where each ritual act reminded him of betrayal toward his inner beliefs.

The persistence of old beliefs can be explained through Primary Socialization, a concept proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Primary socialization occurs in childhood, when individuals absorb the objective world of society and internalize it as their subjective reality. Religion learned during this stage becomes internalized not merely as knowledge but as absolute truth.

Such residues of primary socialization are highly resistant to change. For Subject D, Islam was not merely an organizational affiliation but the “home” of his subjective reality. Therefore, the intense guilt he experienced cannot simply be interpreted as a negative emotion. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it represents punishment from the Superego, which internalizes parental and societal moral norms.

This crisis culminated in an existential question: “*This isn’t me—what am I doing?*” This statement indicates self-alienation. His body performed rituals, but his consciousness rejected them.

From Erving Goffman’s Dramaturgical perspective, Subject D was performing on the Front Stage as a devout Christian husband and father to maintain family harmony and social expectations. Yet on the Back Stage, where the social mask could be removed, identity chaos occurred.

Although Festinger suggests that individuals usually attempt to reduce dissonance through behavioral change, environmental change, or cognitive rationalization, Subject D’s attempt at rationalization ultimately failed. His original belief system had never been fully dismantled; it was merely repressed for social functionality. Consequently, repeated Christian rituals did not produce calming habituation but instead widened the gap between Essential Identity (who he truly was) and Performative Identity (what he socially enacted).

3. The Collapse of Relational Architecture and the Mechanism of Re-Conversion

In the psychological trajectory of individuals who convert for pragmatic motives, the final phase often involves the dissolution of the new religious identity. In Subject D’s narrative, the climax of cognitive dissonance ultimately led to re-conversion, returning to his original religion, Islam.

The primary trigger was the disintegration of his relationship with Shalom, which had previously served as the sole *raison d’être* for his Christian identity.

Subject D described Christianity metaphorically as a “house,” while his wife and child functioned as the “pillars” supporting that structure. This metaphor reflects the cognitive structure of his belief system.

Through the lens of Relational Spirituality, spirituality in this case was not autonomous but embedded within interpersonal relationships. His Christian faith did not rest on independent theological foundations or a direct relationship with God; instead, it depended entirely on the existence and quality of his family relationships.

When the “pillars” collapsed due to separation and lifestyle conflicts, the theological “house” lost its existential relevance. Without Shalom and his child as emotional validators of his religious sacrifice, he lost the motivation to remain within Christianity.

Through Rational Choice Theory, this decision can also be understood as a recalculation of costs and benefits. Initially, the benefit of marriage outweighed the cost of leaving Islam. However, once the marriage deteriorated, the benefits disappeared while the psychological costs—guilt, dissonance, inner unrest—remained high.

Returning to Islam therefore became a rational strategy to minimize psychological loss and restore mental equilibrium.

Re-conversion also functioned as a process of mental homeostasis. By aligning his behavior (praying again, leaving church) with his core belief system, the subject eliminated the main source of cognitive dissonance. He reported experiencing peace and the sense of being “on the right path” again.

Another crucial aspect of this process is the secrecy surrounding his re-conversion. Subject D concealed both his previous conversion and his return to Islam from his extended family, particularly his mother and older sibling.

From Goffman’s Impression Management perspective, this secrecy was a strategy to protect his moral status within the family. He feared that admitting his conversion—even though he had returned—would cause disappointment, conflict, and social stigma.

This secrecy illustrates that religious conversion in Indonesia is not merely a personal theological matter but also a socially sensitive arena. Even when someone returns to their original religion, the historical trace of apostasy is often perceived as a moral stain that must be hidden.

Thus, Subject D’s spiritual journey reflects not only a personal theological struggle but also a complex negotiation with social expectations, family norms, and identity management within a communal society.

IV. CONCLUSION

The narrative journey of the subject in this study presents a compelling picture of how fragile a structure of belief can be when it is built solely on a foundation of pragmatism. Based on an in-depth examination of the empirical data, several fundamental conclusions can be drawn. First, religious conversion driven by extrinsic motives—in this case the partner’s pregnancy and the demands of marital responsibility—tends to have very weak durability. Although a permissive and inclusive social environment initially facilitated the process of ritual transition, this sociological convenience failed to reach the subject’s deeper spiritual dimension. The new religion ultimately functioned merely as a “social mask” or an instrument for achieving worldly objectives, which quickly lost its relevance once those objectives namely the preservation of the household were no longer attainable. Second, the most striking phenomenon that emerged was the manifestation of cognitive dissonance. The subject was trapped in a state of *bad faith*, or self-deception. Despite physically performing Christian rituals with a high level of discipline (orthopraxy), the subject’s cognitive structure and cultural memory continued to resist the new doctrine. The persistent inner unrest was not merely a temporary emotional response, but rather a psychological alarm signaling that the integrity of the self was becoming fragmented. Consequently, religious practices that should have brought liberation instead became a painful stage of performance. Third, the subject’s decision to return to Islam can be understood as a strategic move within the subject’s “psychic economy.” Through the lens of Rational Choice Theory, the subject discontinued the “investment” in Christianity because the psychological costs—such as guilt and

inner turmoil—far outweighed any remaining benefits after the collapse of the marriage. Returning to the original religion therefore became a definitive resolution to eliminate cognitive dissonance and restore coherence to the subject’s life narrative. The metaphor of “a house that has lost its supporting pillar” poignantly and tragically illustrates that for individuals undergoing pragmatic conversion, God is often implicitly anchored to the presence of another human being; and when that person departs, the newly adopted faith is abandoned as well.

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