THE REVIVAL of evolutionary theory in the social sciences has been accompanied by a steadily growing body of empirical research. However, there is one vital sphere of human behavior that has been largely neglected by the community of evolutionists: religion. Comparative studies of religion that are comparable to Otterbein's (1970) detailed examination of warfare, Udy's (1959) research into the dynamics of preindustrial production or Lenski's (1970) massive work simply are not present. This research does not assume to be as complete or detailed as the above mentioned works. Instead, it offers a general theory of religion that might serve as a direction for research and tests the theory by the use of the comparative method with respect to one specific type of religion, supportive monotheism.

Social Cohesion as a Function of Religions

Of all the hypothesis that address themselves to the question of the origins of religion there are two that hold dominant positions in sociological and anthropological theory. The first of these is the "Life Crisis Thesis" advocated by Malonowski (1948). According to this viewpoint religion emerges as a response to, and as an aid in overcoming, severe life crises that threaten the continuity of the social order. Thus, religion is seen as a mechanism that aids individuals and groups in coping with a crisis (death, natural disasters, etcetera) and, by doing so, contributes to a reestablishment of social equilibrium. While this thesis appears to be widely accepted it has little bearing on the problem at hand so I wish to deal more extensively with the "Cohesion Thesis" that was developed by Durkheim (1961).

Durkheim's Cohesion Thesis, like that of Malonowski, appears to be widely accepted even though it was developed with reference to a few societies and the data upon which the Thesis is based are suspect. Indeed, I believe most scholars
would agree with Swanson’s (1960: 17) position that we can accept the spirit of Durkheim’s argument if not the details. It is with this qualification in mind that Swanson (1969: 16) has re-phrased Durkheim’s Thesis to read: people develop their concept of supernaturals out of the model provided by the social structure in which they live. Once a social structure generates a religion then that religion comes to function as a cohesive device because, having emerged from a given structure, it is very likely that the religion will endorse that structure: there is a suspicious correlation between the acts that are punished/rewarded by the spirits and those acts that are proscribed/prescribed by the social norms. It is of social order—early Christianity being a major case in point. Religious groups that condemn the prevailing social order (“sects”) have been found to occur mainly among social groups that lie outside of the mainstream of society and, furthermore, as a sect’s membership mobilizes into the mainstream the sect tends to convert into a denomination (i.e., comes to accept prevailing social norms) (Wilson 1964: 482–497)... In short, variant groups generate religions that are at variance with the dominant social order but when, and if, the groups merge with the dominant order they and their religions tend to adopt the norms of the social order.

Durkheim’s Thesis, then, argues that the social structure is the model from which religion develops and then, by support of the structure, religion comes to perform a cohesive function.

If Durkheim is correct then we should be able to specify what the structural conditions are that generate different types of religion: we should be able to identify specific structural antecedents for ancestor worship, totemism, animatism, polytheism, and so on. I wish to suggest that by combining Durkheim’s Thesis with the basic propositions of evolutionary theory we can extrapolate what these structural conditions should be with respect to at least one type of religion, supportive monotheism.

**Monotheisms**

A specification of what is meant by “monotheism” necessarily precedes any theoretical discussion of that subject. Traditionally, “monotheism” has been taken to mean the presence of “one god” with attributes such that this spirit rules his dominion with final, unquestioned authority and all other supernaturals are seen only as extensions of the wishes of this Supreme Spirit. Swanson (1960: 55) has criticized this definition on the very good grounds that such religions are so rare that it becomes useless for comparative research. Instead, Swanson has identified several types of monotheisms, the common factor shared by each is the belief that the spirit (or spirits) is the creator and/or the ultimate governor of the universe (1960: 209–210). The degree and type of activity of the spirit then becomes the basis for developing three-sub-classifications. The weakest type is *otiose monotheism* in which the creator spirit is believed to have removed himself from involvement in his creations. Such spirits are occasionally, but