



Religion and Regional Culture in Modern America

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Cityscapes have become so familiar to the viewing public that a few frames showing masses of towering structures against the sky is enough to establish an urban setting for a movie or television show. Perspective, along with glimpses of a city's well-known distinguishing features, provides specificity. The New York skyline nearly always has water in the foreground, for instance, and Central Park is often visible. San Francisco has buildings perched on the edges of streets that tilt precipitously up or down, and usually there is a glimpse of the Golden Gate Bridge. Dallas has glass and steel skyscrapers rising out of apparently endless open space. And so on. If the place being signaled is one of the nation's midsize municipalities, virtually interchangeable images of a dense accumulation of tall buildings generally suffices.

Whether specific or generic, and whether of cities of huge or middling size, most modern American cityscapes don't include identifiable places of worship. Despite their spires, steeples, Romanesque battlements, bell towers, and minarets, in today's photographic renderings of cities, urban churches, cathedrals, synagogues, and mosques are more often than not overwhelmed by the buildings in which a city's business (commerce, finance, trade, et cetera) gets done. This absence of architectural cues linking earth to heaven supports the conventional notion that cities are secular places. In the days when cameras were a rarity, depictions of cityscapes were novelties. But Americans loved them and in city after city photographers made determined efforts to locate high places from which they could portray significant portions of urban landscapes. Found in a profusion of late nineteenth and early twentieth century souvenir booklets and illustrated hardback volumes, these visual representations of urban America often included so many structural ensigns of the faith they leave the impression that, in olden days, city lives were enmeshed in religion.

The reasons are obvious. Whether they were trying to appeal to tourists or were simply a part of the urban "boosterism" of the period, the publishers of such works typically settled on impressing readers with eye-catching shots of imposing buildings. Because religious structures were often more majestic or beautiful or interesting than the utilitarian structures in which commerce and industry were carried out, they received lots of attention. As a result, when

we look over these illustrations we often conclude that religion was far more significant in U.S. cities a hundred years ago than it is as the twenty-first century opens.

But this sort of comparison based on the “bricks and mortar” of urban religion can be misleading. The structures in which worship takes place in a given community are certainly important because they are physical evidence of engagement, commitment, devotion, and, in most cases, sacrifice, of congregations of religious people. They are indispensable signifiers of the place of religion in the culture of any place, be it urban or rural. Much more than palpable evidence of the religious belief and acceptance of particular creeds—things that are, finally, more metaphysical than material—religious structures are often the places where it is easiest to see faith becoming tangible through the creation of community. What takes place inside and around religious structures is what really matters.

Chapels, churches, tabernacles, synagogues, temples, and mosques all provide environments in which, to use popular terminology, social capital takes root and flourishes. In a nation where being part of a religious community is truly a voluntary condition, religious structures are places where a miscellaneous assemblage of individuals and families can become a people of God. Safe, because culture (even in cities) permits them to be safe, they are places where leadership rests on common consent and where risks can be taken as service is rendered, both to members of the faith communities that inhabit them and to those who stand outside.

But just as cityscapes can be misleading about the extent of religious presence in urban places, so depending on surveys of the physical plants in which religious activities (worship and otherwise) happen can produce an unreliable measure of urban religiosity. One obvious reason for this is the changed housing and traffic patterns that have undercut the vitality of many downtown areas, leaving handsome religious structures that house small and aging congregations in nearly every metropolitan area. In many instances, members of the fragile faith communities inhabiting these giant architectural artifacts make strenuous efforts to provide services to needy people who dwell nearby. Despite their efforts to make service a priority, however, such congregations are often forced to expend most of their religious energies in what seems a never ending struggle to maintain their places of meeting.

Most cities also have a variety of churches that do not look like churches. Resembling warehouses covered with aluminum siding more than religious edifices, some such structures are home to huge congregations but are only identified as houses of worship by signs announcing the times of services. Abandoned commercial buildings are sometimes turned into churches, and vice versa. And appearances are deceptive in other ways. Take the case of the chapels that house wards of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In many (perhaps most) cases in urban and suburban areas, these quite modest

structures are home to two or three—or sometimes even four—congregations who meet sequentially in three-hour blocks of time on Sundays.

Then there is the matter of how to interpret the significance of the roles churches play in urban neighborhoods. These neighborhood churches may well be urban counterparts to the fabled “churches in the wildwood,” faith-based institutions that brought communities of rural folks together. But despite the general perception that seems particularly evident among those who support the forging of strong partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, not all of these institutions are firmly imbedded in their surroundings. Many neighborhood churches do serve as anchors of urban neighborhoods. But a significant finding is emerging from a multifaceted multi-year study of religion in Indianapolis, the 13th largest city in the nation: in this city where presidential advisor Stephen Goldsmith served two terms as mayor, a considerable percentage of the well-kept “neighborhood” churches—and some not so well kept—are actually gathering places for members who commute from outside the neighborhood to worship in a familiar place.

Exploring Regional Religious Variety

Keeping the warning that “you can’t always tell by looking” in mind, I set out to find a manageable way to address the topic of urban religion that would allow me to move beyond conducting what amounted to surveys of the religious landscape. To summarize what was neither a simple or straightforward way of concocting a study of religion and culture in urban America, I selected five cities to treat as case studies. They are Providence (RI), Lynchburg (VA), Indianapolis, Salt Lake City, and Seattle, in part because they represent very different sorts of urban histories. Two of them, Providence and Salt Lake City, were founded for religious reasons. Two others, Lynchburg and Seattle, came into existence for economic reasons, while Indianapolis was created, literally *ex nihilo*, to be an administrative center. Reflecting very different economic and political situations as well as population characteristics, their individual developmental trajectories reveal diverse patterns of municipal growth and change. Yet all became significant urban places with distinctive urban cultures. In studying them closely, I came to the conclusion that they are reasonably representative of urban cultures across the nation.

For example, these five cities vary in population size. At the end of the twentieth century, two of the five (Indianapolis and Seattle) had populations that put them in the list of the nation’s 100 largest cities, and all except Lynchburg were listed as anchoring Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) with populations of more than 600,000. Providence, Indianapolis, and Salt Lake City are more or less standard “mid-size” cities.

Despite its small size—the estimated population for Lynchburg proper in 1998 was only 66,000—this mountain metropolis in western Virginia is as important to my study as the other four cities. A multitude of small cities is spread all across the national landscape and to get a representative picture of

religion and culture in urban America, I needed to include one of them. Lynchburg, which was classified as a city virtually from the time it was established in 1786 and which is now the center of a standard Metropolitan Statistical Area with a population that exceeds 100,000, seemed an appropriate choice.

In addition to size, location in the various regions of the nation was also a key criterion of selection for four of these cities. Location, however, was not my reason for including Salt Lake City. The Utah capital is included because, at least *de facto* if not *de jure*, it has always had an established church. Placing this metropolis in my urban array permits me to describe what city lives might have been like in the U.S. if the separation of church and state had not been made part of the nation's constitutional system.

With regard to the cities I selected as representative of their regions, it was necessary to find a way to make sure that they were not likewise "outliers," cities dramatically different from the other cities in their regions. In order to test that, I created a set of four urban cohorts, each composed of 18 mid-sized cities in the regions where the case study cities are situated.¹ These regional cohorts permit statistical comparison of the institutional configuration of religious bodies in Providence, Lynchburg, Indianapolis, and Seattle with the institutional configurations of cities in the New England/Mid-Atlantic region, the South, the Midwest, and the Far West.

The Challenges of Counting

Having selected five cities to treat as case studies, I followed a research agenda that combined research on the ground and in the library. Borrowing techniques familiar to journalists, I visited each city several times, attending worship services and essentially becoming a participant observer in various religious activities. In addition, I conducted interviews with clerical and lay leaders of religious organizations, political figures, religion reporters for local newspapers, and a considerable variety of unsystematically selected people on the streets and in the pews. Besides that, I visited local libraries, examining materials in their specialized local collections (which, among much else, is how I learned about the contents of souvenir booklets, collections of picture postcards, and locally published hard-back volumes about these cities).

Since people who are active in religious bodies organize themselves into congregations, I prepared for my visits to each city by examining the local telephone company's yellow pages and constructing crude congregational landscapes. Once there I did lots of driving around and about, surveying the religious landscape and taking pictures. But remembering that warning about not always being able "to tell by looking," I also made an effort to determine how many people were involved in the various denominational bodies in the cities I had selected for study.

For this information, I turned to *Churches and Church Membership in the*

1 Not included in these cohorts are any of the nation's megacities, i.e., New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth. Note also that these are cities, not Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

*United States, 1990: An Enumeration by Region State and County Based on Data Reported for 133 Church Groupings.*² Sponsored by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies and published by the Glenmary Research Center, this work is the third in a series of volumes of statistical reports that are issued once each decade.³ To a considerable degree, these Glenmary volumes resemble volumes containing denominational data published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1896, 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936. Unfortunately, whereas the volumes published by the Census Bureau contain information that is organized by incorporated cities as well as by state and county, the Glenmary data (as they are called) are organized only by denominations, states, and counties.

Concern for the separation of church and state, plus the restrictions on the spending of public moneys during the Great Depression, stopped the Census Bureau's practice of publishing decennial volumes containing more complete place-based information about religion than the Glenmary statistical reports. Aside from compilations of statistical information provided by the official judiciaries of denominational bodies, there is another way to get reasonably close estimates of the institutional configuration of the nation and its 50 states. This is information issuing from analyses of data yielded by survey research in which individuals provide answers to queries.

As unquestionably valuable as they are, both of these measures furnish statistical pictures of the institutional configuration of religion in cities that are, to put it plainly, quite crude. In the case of survey research, information is provided to researchers by individuals, which means that, no matter however carefully drawn, samples may include too few respondents from particular geographic areas to allow the construction of local institutional profiles. In addition, since respondents tend to provide the answers they think researchers want or answers that picture their ideal rather than real selves, responses to questions about religious activity and religious affiliation sometimes indicate what the respondent wishes he or she had done rather than what they actually did. From the perspective of comparison, making survey research results congruent with the statistical information provided by denominational bureaucrats rather than individual members is sometimes difficult because respondents are not always sure about the official names of the religious bodies to which they belong. This calls for a certain amount of translation—even guesswork—on the part of those who analyze the data.

Besides having to present county results, providing at the same time information about what percentage of the county population are city dwellers, two

2 Supported by Lilly Endowment, Inc., this volume contains the responses to a survey instrument that was distributed by the Church of the Nazarene International Headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. The data were collected in their offices. Martin B. Bradley, Norman M. Green, Jr., Dale E. Jones, Mac Lynn, and Lou McNeil were the volume's editors. The year of publication was 1992.

3 Because the Census Bureau published these volumes, many people seem to think that the information in these volumes came from the tabulations of results of information contained on census forms. This is not the case. The data were collected from institutions rather than individuals.

more serious problems arise in working with the statistical results reported by denominational judicatories. One is that not all denominational bodies supply information to those who gather the data. The other, of growing importance, is the fact that information is only collected for Judeo-Christian bodies.

A final difficulty is reconciling the two types of information about the institutional configuration of religion in various places. As they have gone about their work, researchers analyzing survey data (particularly that yielded from the General Social Survey conducted annually by the staff of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago) and analysts working with the Glenmary data have been using incompatible denominational taxonomies. As a result, they have come up with dissimilar institutional configurations of American religion.

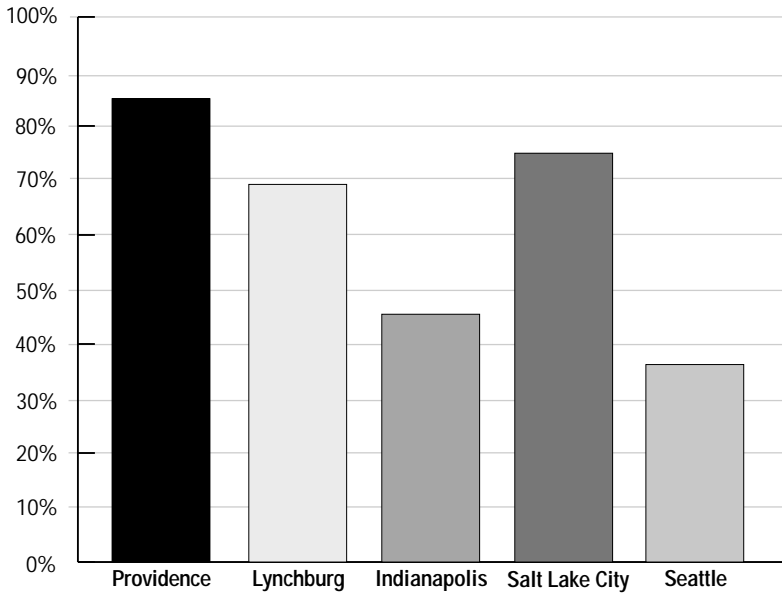
The Religion and Urban Culture Project staff at the Polis Center at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis recently developed a new denominational taxonomy. It takes into account existing classification schemes that have been in the forefront of sociological analysis, as well as those currently in use in analysis of the Glenmary data. Consequently, this new scheme mediates, as it were, between taxonomies designed for the analysis of information provided by individuals and those used to categorize information about denominations provided by the religious bodies themselves.

This taxonomy may be conveniently accessed through the Religion and Urban Culture section of the IUPUI Polis Center website. The address that takes on directly to the site is http://www.polis.iupui.edu/RUC/Research/Glenmary_by_Polis_Types_as_table.htm. For the purposes of describing religion in my five case study cities here, however, it is sufficient to note that in my analysis the denominational groupings are clustered into the following six categories:

- Mainstream Protestantism
- Evangelicals (including Holiness, Pentecostal, and Fundamentalists as well as Evangelical groups)
- Black Protestants
- Catholics
- Other Christians (including Confessional and Orthodox bodies)
- Non-Christian bodies

The mainstream Protestant category only includes the so-called “seven sister” denominations, i.e., United Methodists, American Baptists, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Episcopalians, Lutherans, United Church of Christ (Congregationalists), and the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. When the Glenmary data are used as the basis of analysis, Jews are the only body in the Non-Christian category. As the numbers of adherents in such other Non-Christian bodies as Muslims, Buddhist, and Hindus increases, the necessity of finding some means of assessing the size of those bodies will grow increasingly acute. As yet, however, no agreed-upon consistent way exists to determining

Percentage of Adherents in Cities in Case Studies in 1990



statistical measures of the numbers of adherents of such bodies.

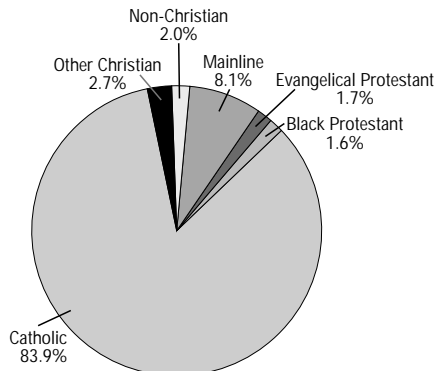
Examination of breakdowns of the religious groupings in the cities in my regional cohorts as well in my five case study cities reveals that high levels of church adherence are often a function of the numbers of Roman Catholics in a city. Notwithstanding this anomaly, such a wide disparity exists when levels of church adherence in Providence, Lynchburg, Indianapolis, Salt Lake City and Seattle are compared it is obvious that the place of institutionalized reli-

Providence, Rhode Island

1990 City Population: 160,728

1990 Providence County Populations: 596,270

Proportion of Church Adherents in Populations: 84.7%



gion in these five cities is significantly different.

Ever since I developed this strategy for configuring the denominational arrays in cities in the United States, the general reaction whenever I have presented all five of them to an audience has been one that might be summarized as “Gee whiz! That’s *very* interesting!” With this I am in complete agreement. But the fact that it is interesting does not begin to answer critical questions that good professors always ask their graduate students who have gathered up and organized a great deal of information. These questions are “So what?” and “How does knowing this help us to know other things?”

From the perspective of creating profiles of specific cities, the “so what” question generates a further set of questions. Is a single religious body paramount, larger by far in terms of numbers than any other religious body in the city? Has it been that way from the beginning? If not, when did the balance shift from one to another religious body? How does religious dominance play out in particular urban cultures? How much formal and informal authority does a dominant religious body’s leadership cadre exercise in the social, political, and economic arenas of the various cities?

In brief compass, here are some “so what” answers with regard to my five city array. At the present time, three of these five cities—Providence, Lynchburg, and Salt Lake City—have dominant religious bodies. But their dominance manifests itself in disparate ways. The denominational clusters in Indianapolis and Seattle are reasonably balanced. But religion outside the Judeo-Christian framework is remarkably different in these two cities.

Catholicism is pre-eminent in Providence; it reigns supreme in numerical terms. But it has not always been so. The city, home to the “First Baptist Church in America,” was founded in 1636 explicitly as “a refuge for distressed consciences.” For over two hundred years, consciences in Providence—distressed or otherwise—were nearly all Protestant. Not until 1836 was a Catholic parish organized. But by 1865, there was an incredible rise in the number of immigrants in the city and most of them were either Catholics or Jews. The religious landscape was rapidly altered; by 1900, the numbers of Catholics not only overwhelmed all other denominational groups singly but all the others added together.

Despite their numerical dominance, their arrival after the Civil War put Catholics into the “Johnny-come-lately” category. The presence of their parochial schools made them influential enough in the educational realm (especially the K-12 part of it) to generate what amounted to an anti-Catholic backlash that they found it difficult to overcome. Because they were primarily working class people, Catholics exercised any economic muscle they had mainly through labor unions. Partially for that reason, their awesome numbers only belatedly pushed Catholics into the higher reaches of political power. Moreover, a very fine study of the city’s middle class from 1820 through 1940 indicates that a direct correlation existed between being middle class and being Protestant.⁴

4 John S. Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

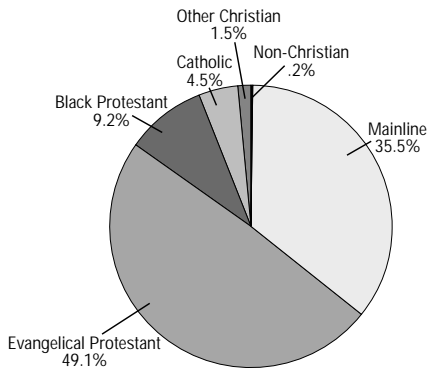
Nativist sentiments and anti-Catholic actions played a big role in the city's history. Yet the history of the shift from Protestant to Catholic dominance seems now to be playing out in such an irenic manner that where once it was unwelcome, pluralism today is a valued part of modern Providence. Certainly the Church Federation continues to be a force whose actions have great influence, likely because its chief executive seems to have become *the* Protestant voice. When he speaks, the Catholic bishop hears what he says, and—at least on the surface—religious cooperation rather than conflict is the watchword.

Lynchburg, Virginia

1990 City Population: 60,049

1990 Campbell County Populations: 113,621

Proportion of Church Adherents in Populations: 68.6%



The history of the religious community in Lynchburg is very different. Although it is known as a Baptist city, not all the Baptists in the city are of the same stripe. The rise to prominence of the Reverend Jerry Falwell and the post-World War II development of the Thomas Road Baptist Church into a genuinely powerful force within conservative Evangelicalism separated Lynchburg's Baptists into what amounts to quite separate groups. The American Baptists are represented in the mainline slice of the pie in the chart that describes the denominational configuration of the city. But the Baptist division is not simply American Baptists standing over and against all the rest. Despite the classification of all other Baptist groups as Evangelicals, my conversations with various Baptist ministers and Baptist lay people in the city made it clear that it is not only American Baptists who are not anxious to be labeled "Falwell-followers."

Visiting Lynchburg convinced me that despite its assertion that it is a local church, a probable majority of the Thomas Road Baptist Church's members are not Lynchburg residents. To some extent this is explained by the fact that most of the students attending Liberty University, an educational institution that Pastor Falwell established and over which he presides, become members of the congregation, or at least attend services there during their stay in the

city. But that does not entirely explain the presence of people who are not from Lynchburg in worship in the Thomas Road sanctuary on Sundays. Many people drive into the city from the surrounding rural countryside to go to Sunday School and church. In addition, the church maintains a fleet of busses that transport people from all over the western part of Virginia to attend Sunday services.

Due to the church's electronic ministry, an overwhelming proportion of its financial support comes from outside the city. In keeping with that reality, Pastor Falwell's prominence on the national scene may very well make him more a more forceful figure outside than inside Lynchburg. Yet the church is there, as is Liberty University with which it is directly connected.

Perhaps it is Falwell's very visibility, or perhaps the situation is more complicated. But it became obvious to me when I visited Lynchburg that the presence of this megachurch in this small city divides the community—and not just the religious community—as surely between “them and us” as Catholicism's presence in Providence once divided that city. No Lynchburg Church Federation exists to unite those standing apart from the Thomas Road/Liberty University complex with its parochial school, summer day camp, and other human service programs that parallel human service programs existing elsewhere in the city. For all that, Lynchburg is one of the core cities of the nation's Christian Right. The local response to this reality is that among Protestant groups who are not as conservative as Falwell and his fellows (and among Protestants and Catholics) there is a much more dynamic ecumenical ambience than I found in any of the other cities I have studied.

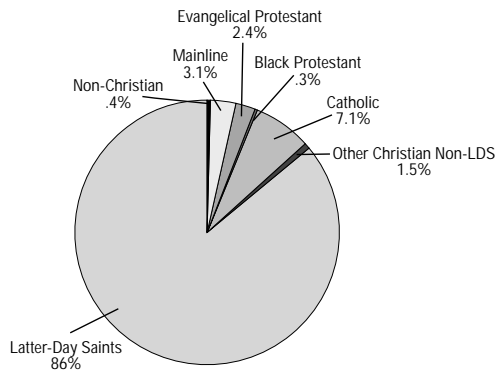
In both Providence and Lynchburg, the dominance of a single religious group came about long after the city assumed its shape as a metropolitan area.

Salt Lake City, Utah

1990 City Population: 159,936

1990 Salt Lake County Populations: 725,956

Proportion of Church Adherents in Populations: 74.7%



This is not true of Salt Lake City, a municipality founded in 1847 by Latter-day Saints that was once the principal city of the Mormon “Kingdom of God.” In the past century, this city has undergone a transformation that has not reduced Latter-day Saint dominance so much as it has relocated it. Now, rather than being the center of the Kingdom of God, Salt Lake City is the headquarters city of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This was a significant internal shift, but it was no small realignment consisting mainly of a change in nomenclature. Whereas the LDS General Authorities (the leadership cadre of the church) once had direct control of the whole culture, including its politics and economics as well as its social and religious life, the church was forced to relinquish that control (along with its peculiar marital practice that allowed men to have more wives than one) in the 1880s and 1890s. Church leaders gradually retreated back toward the ecclesiastical domain, moving toward a platform not unlike ecclesiastical platforms from which other religious leaders exercise authority in America. But that retreat proceeded so gradually that LDS General Authorities continued to preside over entire segments of the economy for several generations after 1900 while Latter-day Saints with aboveboard connections to the church leadership held critically important political posts. Since Saints holding exalted church positions are expected to earn their own livings, even today so many highly placed Latter-day Saints serve in positions of secular power that in point of fact, the separation of church and state often seems to be a legal fiction.

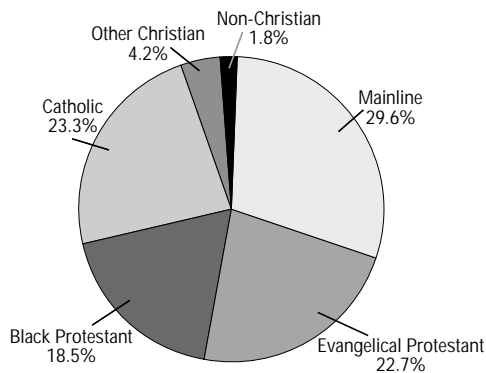
Church leaders regularly advise the Saints that non-members should not be referred to as Gentiles nor treated as outsiders. But the distinction between them and us is still so tangible in Salt Lake City that people who are not members of the LDS Church or connected through kinship to LDS families refer

Indianapolis, Indiana

1990 City Population: 731,327

1990 Marion County Populations: 797,159

Proportion of Church Adherents in Populations: 45.3%



to themselves as Gentiles. What this indicates is that it may be positive or negative vis-à-vis Mormonism, but everyone in the city has a religious identity.

With regard to Indianapolis, the mainline slice of the denominational pie is certainly thinner than it once was. But in the 1990 configuration of religious groups in the Hoosier capital, the mainline remains the largest denominational cluster. The balance of power within the mainline has shifted somewhat, as the Disciples of Christ (once one of the largest religious groupings in the city), the Presbyterians, and Episcopalians have lost more members than the Methodists, Baptists, and Lutherans. But the power that comes with the control of financial resources helps to maintain the place of Episcopalians (who have three parishes that were endowed by pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly) and Presbyterians (who possess the status benefit of having members who sit on the Board of Directors of Lilly Endowment, Incorporated).

The status and authority once held in mainline hands has nevertheless been drastically diminished in the past half-century. There are two main reasons. In losing members, the mainline churches experienced what I have heard described as a failure of nerve. Mainline Protestant laymen and laywomen in the city held onto the balance of power on practically every important Indianapolis board of directors, board of trustees, and so on. But no longer comfortable exercising authority unilaterally, they welcomed Catholics, Jews, Black Protestants and others into the city's "establishment," thereby severing what had once been a virtually direct connection between religious and secular authority. At the same time, mainline Protestantism was less and less in the public square as churches turned inward, focusing on their own congregations and as the members of those congregations seemed to want from their clergy a therapeutic presence more than public leadership.

Unlike many other Midwestern cities, Indianapolis has never had a large Catholic majority. Yet Nativist, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic sentiment was expressed during the 1920s in strong Ku Klux Klan activity in the city as well as the state (which for a brief interval was actually controlled by the Klan). Many Protestant ministers in Indianapolis were at least members, if not leaders of the Klan. Still, other than during this decade, Catholicism has not been enough of a threat to rouse virulent opposition in the city and more than a few Catholic business and professional men have become leading figures in the city. To a lesser extent, the same pattern has held true for Jews.

In the past two or three decades, the rise of the Christian Right has been an incipient threat to the mainline. Overall, however, not much heat has been generated by religious controversy. The Church Federation, once a powerful force within the city, has fallen on hard times, and the Interchurch Center, once the jewel of the city's Protestant core, is having trouble filling its office space and making its public spaces central to the life of the religious community.

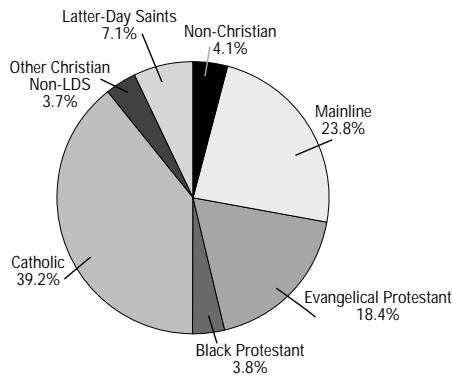
For all that, the Indianapolis religious community could well become reasonably newsworthy since Stephen Goldsmith is an important advisor to President George Bush on faith-based partnerships with government. The city's high profile "Front Porch Alliance," a city agency that works with value-shaping organizations, particularly faith-based organizations, might not become the stone at the head of the corner of the organizational structure of a new socio-political gospel for the 21st century, but it set a pattern that is likely to be followed in many other cities in the months and years to come.

Seattle, Washington

1990 City Population: 516,259

1990 King County Populations: 1,507,319

Proportion of Church Adherents in Populations: 35.8%



Finally, what is there to say about religion in Seattle? Surely not much with regard to how the government and religious community might be forging partnerships. When I was there in early 2001, I spoke with the deputy mayor responsible for human services. "How," I asked, "is Seattle taking advantage of the faith-based partnerships made possible under 'Charitable Choice' legislation?" "What," she responded, "is Charitable Choice?"

This is not as surprising as it might sound since religion does not play a particularly visible role in the Northwest generally and in this city in particular. The appointment of an openly gay clergyman to the deanship of the Episcopal cathedral, the most visible clergy post in the city, made news. But even on Saturdays, in both of the city's main newspapers religious news sometimes merits less than half a page. One explanation for this may be that conflict and scandal make news, and since cooperation is more likely than rivalry to be present on Seattle's denominational landscape, there is not much religion in the news.

It is much more likely that the real story of religion in Seattle is not entirely contained in the religious bodies represented on the denominational configuration pie chart. Stopping there suggests, as many people believe, that

Starbucks is Seattle's communion cup, that this city is the ultimate secular urban space. But if the Judeo-Christian blinders are removed, it quickly becomes apparent that religion in this northwestern terminus of the U.S. is quite literally "all over the map." Asian religions are present, as is Islam, Ba'hai, and so on. But of greater moment, spirituality, rather than religious practice, is the hallmark of Seattle religiosity. And spirituality is connected to nature, to the human body, to animals, even to free trade. Altars exist in gorgeous religious structures, but are as often found as stopping points on hiking trails or mountainside overhangs. What is revealed when the pie chart's confines are removed is that the apparent secularity is a veneer. Hence Seattle may well be a harbinger of urban religion in the future.

Considered at the macro rather than micro level, one thing the stories of religion in these five cities reveal is that a dominant religion in a city lends vitality to religious life generally. Not only is a religious identity mandated for people who live in Salt Lake City. If to a lesser degree, the same is true in Providence.

This reality emerged in an interview with the senior minister of a large Protestant church in downtown Providence. He said that in the nearly 20 years he had been serving in that capacity, he had never conducted a marriage ceremony in which one of the principals was not Catholic. "Therefore," he said, "I see it as our responsibility to make sure our parishioners know what we believe. Only then will they be able to make informed decisions about how to conduct their religious lives within an interfaith marriage." In Lynchburg, religion is on the surface, very much in the public square. As a result, few Lynchburg residents can take their faith for granted. They need to know where they stand. In such a situation, religious identity becomes as much a part of a person's identity as race, gender, and class. The outcome of this is that congregations are healthier and worship is as much a part of life as working or going to school.

In Indianapolis and Seattle, neither of which has a dominant religion, it is not rare to find individuals who, when asked about their religious identity, respond with an answer that is best translated as "Nothing." Everywhere one finds "miscellaneous Christians," so much so that signals of a lack of affiliation or extended religious inactivity even creep into obituaries. Rather than noting the deceased's denominational affiliation, many obituaries in the newspapers of these two cities read that "he [or she] was of the Christian faith." Or they contain no mention of religion whatsoever. Religion may very well be alive and well where there is no dominant faith community. But it is not out in the open for researchers (and journalists) to see.

Patterns of Charitable Giving

Finally, there is a larger “so what” question emerging as the nation confronts the matter of how the current hot button “faith-based initiatives” might play out. Data emerging from the congregational studies of sociologists, especially those of Mark Chaves and Nancy Ammerman (See Chapters I and VI) will surely be more helpful in this instance than anything that might be gained by examining the so-called “big picture.” Nevertheless, some knowledge of how larger giving patterns relate to church adherence could turn out to provide useful background as media representatives develop stories about Charitable Choice and Faith-based Initiative programs in the nation’s cities.

To find answers about whether the growth of particular religious bodies (Catholics, Black Protestants, and so on) points to increases in overall charitable giving, I turned for help to the staff of the Center on Non-profits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute which houses the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Working with staff members Tom Pollock and Marie Gantz, and using the denominational taxonomy that we developed at the Polis Center as a way of categorizing church adherence data, we looked for correlations between church adherence and giving as measured by direct support reported by 501(c)(3) organizations on IRS Form 990 and by the information reported to the IRS by taxpayers who itemize their charitable contributions on their tax forms.

Controlling for population size, median income, and percentage of itemizers and of population over 65 years old since they tend to give more, we found some preliminary indications of directions of giving. The word “preliminary” needs to be emphasized here because (a) church adherence data is only available for 1990, while the available set of giving data is for 1998; and the giving data is itself preliminary since only preliminary statistics were provided by the IRS to the Center for Charitable Statistics.⁵ Statistical analysis, which took into account living in all statistical metropolitan areas of the United States, carried out by Marie Gantz revealed the following:

- As the proportion of Mormon adherents in the population increases, there is an increase in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, nor in Western metropolitan areas when Salt Lake City is not included in the analysis. As the proportion of Black Protestant church adherents increases, there is an increase in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) in the Midwest.
- As the proportion of Evangelical adherents increases, there is an increase in itemized contributions, *but* this holds true only in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Southern region. However, the difference is so

⁵ Both of the problems will be overcome before my book comes out since church adherence numbers for the year 2000 will soon be available and a complete set of IRS data is now in the hands of the Center for Charitable Statistics.

strong in the South that it affects the analysis when the populations of all the metropolitan areas in the U.S. are considered.

- As the proportion of mainline Protestant adherents increases, there is a decrease in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Western United States.
- As the proportion of Catholic adherents increases, there is a decrease in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Northeast. There giving increases with an increase in the proportion of Catholics in the population. In the Midwest, an increase in the proportion of Catholics in the population has no impact on the level of giving.
- As the proportion of adherents to Christian churches other than Mainline Protestants, Catholics, Evangelicals, and Mormons increases, there is a decrease in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Midwest. There an increase of “other Christians” in the population leads to a decrease in the level of giving. In the West, an increase in numbers of “other Christians” leads to an increase in the level of giving.
- Looking at all the metropolitan areas of the U.S. together, as the proportion of Jewish adherents increases, there is no significant change in itemized contributions, *but* this only holds true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the Northeast. In the metropolitan areas of other regions, as the proportion of Jews increases, the level of giving increases.
- As the proportion of “other” religious adherents and non-adherents increases, there is no significant change in itemized contributions, *but* this does not hold true in the metropolitan areas (SMSAs) of the West where increasing numbers of unchurched people leads to a decrease in levels of giving.
- No evidence of a significant relationship between religious heterogeneity and itemized giving in metropolitan areas was found in this study.
- For Catholics and mainline Protestants, itemized contributions increase as average church size increases.

With regard to all precise statistics and analytic results presented here, it is crucially important to keep in mind that the Glenmary numbers represent 1990 reports. The 2000 data will not be available until 2002. For all this, even though preliminary, this overview begins to describe religion and culture in Urban America.*

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