

# Religion and Religions in America

Part One

Mark E. Braun\*

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Forty years ago, one of the most famous covers *Time* magazine ever published posed the question, "Is God Dead?" Commenting on the notorious "Death of God" thesis of Thomas J. J. Altizer and others, *Time's* religion writer reported on April 8, 1966, that this question "tantalizes both believers, who perhaps secretly fear that he is, and atheists, who possibly suspect that the answer is no." Langdon Gilkey of the University of Chicago Divinity School said the basic theological problem of the day was the reality of God himself. Even less radical thinkers suggested that "the very basic premise of faith—the existence of a personal God, who created the world and sustains it with his love—is now subject to profound attack."<sup>1</sup>

While "the institutional strength of the churches is nowhere more apparent than in the United States," and "for uncounted millions, faith remains as rock-solid as Gibraltar," *Time* observed that many theologians expressed "qualms about the quality and character of contemporary belief." Church pews were thought to be filled with "practical atheists—disguised non-believers who behave during the rest of the week as if God did not exist." Religion was considered "good for the kids," even if their parents had abandoned it. Particularly among young adults, *Time* noted "an acute feeling that the churches on Sunday are preaching the existence of a God who is nowhere visible in their daily lives."<sup>2</sup>

Less than four years later, another *Time* cover, dated December 26, 1969, seemed to reverse its earlier, drearier verdict. "Is God coming back to life?" *Time* wondered. "Was he ever really 'dead'?" Ministers of all denominations were now trying "to find new ways to carry God back into the everyday life of society" and, in the prevailing cliché of the day, to make him more "relevant." Despite sexual permissiveness, a rising drug culture, and increasing violence of the 1960s, *Time* concluded that young people were "not as irreligious as they seem—far from it." Highly visible churchmen such as Martin Luther King, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, William Sloan Coffin, and Milwaukee's Father James Groppi were addressing long-standing social problems. Most effective were those ministers who displayed "that special gift of God that the Greeks called *charisma*, an ability to inspire energy and enthusiasm among the apathetic and the alienated."<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of a new millennium, it is doubtful that any observer would announce that God or religion is dead in America. What was formerly a "private affair," showing up in the occasional harmless cartoon and the not-very-funny minister-priest-rabbi jokes, has "gone public" in a big way. Roman Catholic bishops weigh in on controversial social issues; televangelist and priestly scandals make national headlines; clergymen venture into politics and offer political commentary; and religious conversations have broadened to include Muslim, Eastern, and non-theist participants.<sup>4</sup> Although we are repeatedly told that "religion is down, spirituality up," Americans nonetheless still think of themselves as "religious."<sup>5</sup> Explicit references to religion now appear regularly in the media, though newscasters are typically better at reporting on religious conflict than explaining the "bone-deep, heart-searing, soul-lifting elements that attract the religious."<sup>6</sup>

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\* Mark Braun teaches at Wisconsin Lutheran College. This first part of the article presents data without analysis, which will follow in Part II.

<sup>1</sup> "Toward a Hidden God," *Time* (April 8, 1966), 82.

<sup>2</sup> "Toward a Hidden God," 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> "The New Ministry: Bringing God Back to Life," *Time* (December 26, 1969), 59-60.

<sup>4</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Religious Cartooning," *Sightings*, August 11, 2003; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2003/0811.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2003/0811.shtml).

<sup>5</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Bad Timing, Worse Deeds," *Sightings*, May 6, 2002; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2002/0506.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2002/0506.shtml).

<sup>6</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Fair Treatment," *Sightings*, August 9, 2004; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2004/0809.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2004/0809.shtml).

According to Naomi Schaefer Riley, "religious education is on the rise in America." Colleges and universities "with strong faith identities, which enforce strict rules on alcohol, relations with the opposite sex, and attendance at religious services, and offer classes from a religious perspective," are becoming increasingly popular, even as their academic standards have also risen.<sup>7</sup>

Religious adherence as a whole is strongest in the middle third of the United States. More than 75% of the population profess adherence to a religious faith in much of North Dakota, northeastern South Dakota, southern Minnesota, northern Iowa, scattered locales in Kansas and Nebraska, almost all of Utah, and portions of Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and the Texas panhandle. The percentage of adherents is lowest in parts of northern Maine and northern Michigan, southern Ohio, much of Colorado and Arizona, northern California, and most of Washington and Oregon.<sup>8</sup>

Gallup and Gallup-like data reveal that people go to church less frequently and take their faith less seriously than they used to, yet religious issues are more "front and center" than they were a generation or two ago. Stories about Orthodox Judaism, Scientologists, Catholics, Christian white supremacists, Sunni Muslims, Evangelicals, Buddhists, Wiccans, and religious arguments regarding right-to-life issues, morality in public office, and religion in popular culture now flood newspapers and the screen.<sup>9</sup>

### **Religions and religion**

The very title, "Religion(s) in America," reveals ambivalence about the subject. If this chapter was called "Religions in America," the reader might expect a lot of comparing and contrasting of theologies, together with histories explaining how the various Synodical branches fit onto the denominational tree, and statistics revealing the rise or decline of various groups. Dropping the "s," and changing the title to "Religion" in America, implies that this chapter will instead focus on the interplay of religion and American politics, society, and education. United States history and life cannot rightly be understood apart from the role religion has played in shaping the country's culture. "Religion" without the "s" may also suggest that the many different religions we see in America are not really that different from one another, or that their similarities outweigh their differences.

Catherine Albanese has noted that a central feature in American religious history from its very beginning was "the manyness of American religions." Native Americans experienced religious pluralism long before European conquerors and settlers arrived. Original Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish immigrants added to this manyness, bringing "not only external differences, but also internal divisions within each group because of the different ways they came to interpret the themes of their given religions."<sup>10</sup>

New forms of old religions flourished in the expansive New World, as did radically new religions, with "new founders, claims of revelation, and behavioral prescriptions." The completed American revolution, acceptance of the First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom, the triumph of voluntarism, and the expanding American frontier all contributed to the development of still greater manyness. Early nineteenth century immigration, now heavily Catholic as well as traditionally Protestant, was augmented by groups outside of Christianity in the late nineteenth century—forms of Eastern religion, religious eclecticism, and occult-metaphysical themes made their appearance. Throughout the twentieth century, "pluralism seemed stronger than ever," as Americans gravitated farther than ever before toward religions increasingly "other" from their own.<sup>11</sup>

But even as there was greater religious diversity, the twentieth century also saw significant attempts at restoring a oneness to American religion—not by resolving the old disagreements that had first created

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<sup>7</sup> Naomi Schaefer Riley, *God in the Quad: How Religious Schools and the Missionary Generation are Changing America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Religious Adherents as a Percentage of All Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000* (Nashville: Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Making Headlines," *Sightings*, April 4, 2005; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2005/0404.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2005/0404.shtml).

<sup>10</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Albanese, *Religions and Religion*, 21.

denominational divisions, but by seeking to rally divergent elements around perceived points of commonality. As the once unchallenged Protestant majority was joined by a tide of Catholic and Jewish immigrants, an "American-ish" civil religion arose that contained elements of all of them yet was not actually any of them. Protestant Fundamentalism (capital F) developed in opposition to theological liberalism and sought to unite conservatives around perceived agreed-upon theological fundamentals. Fundamentalist and revivalistic elements fed a broader Protestant Evangelical movement. Turn-of-the-century tongue-speakers and mid-century charismatics brought Christians with differing theologies together around what they saw as a common experience of rebirth in the Holy Spirit. Ecumenism looked for a common denominator which all the churches could agree on—or at least on the basis of which they could work together with some measure of cooperation.

Broader spiritualisms beyond Judeo-Christian roots embrace even more divergent "others," which purport to embody "truths" that exist in all religions but belong exclusively to no particular faith. "In the New Age," wrote an author of the *New Age Encyclopedia*, "it is believed that people will recognize only one universal religion. While that religion will assume many different forms...the same mystical faith (i.e., the Truth) will underlie each grouping, no matter what label...it chooses."<sup>12</sup>

### **Are the Mainliners still mainline?**

From nondescript beginnings and outright hostility during the colonial era, Roman Catholicism emerged to become by 1850 the most widely held religion in the United States, and it remains so today. Most estimates place Roman Catholic numbers at about one-fourth of the American population as a whole, making Roman Catholics the most mainline of the Mainliners.

The Mainline also includes those Protestant groups that organized and established identities in Europe and transported them to the New World, or that developed in the New World as a reforming movement of those European groups during the colonial era. That would include Anglicans/Episcopalians (heirs to the state church of England that arose from the separation of Henry VIII from Rome); Presbyterians (largely Scottish heirs to the Reformation of John Knox, the most Calvinist of Mainliners); Methodists (following the reform agenda of John Wesley and the extraordinary growth of American Methodism in the early 19th century through circuit riders, camp meetings, and revivalistic preaching); Baptists (following the instincts of Radical Reformers on the Continent but in the United States more of an English than a Continental movement); and Lutherans (German and Scandinavian re-settlers, separated by language and confessional statements, viewed as "not quite Protestant" or "still too Catholic" by more mainline Mainliners.

Proverbial wisdom has had it for some time that Mainliners are in decline. According to a 1987 Gallup poll, Mainliners lost a significant "market share" from the late 1960s to the middle 1980s among those Americans claiming adherence to a particular denomination: Baptists, from 21% to 20%; Methodists 14% to 9%; Lutherans, 7% to 6%; Episcopalians, 3% to 2%, and Presbyterians (hardest hit), 6% to 3%.<sup>13</sup> By another measure, adherence to the "dominant, culturally established faiths held by the majority of Americans" dropped from 67% to 57% between 1952 and 1987.<sup>14</sup> In an assessment from the recently published *Religion by Region* series, the "mainline—or 'oldline'—Protestant denominations have been aging, losing members, or growing more slowly than the population at large, while evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal groups have been growing much faster."<sup>15</sup>

At very least, however, this should not be seen as a recent phenomenon. In the 1930s it was similarly reported that "Mainstream" Protestants registered a combined loss of 33,151 churches and 2,421,664 members, a decline of 29% of its congregations and 31% of its constituents. In the same time frame, Assemblies of God,

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<sup>12</sup> "Introductory Essay: An Overview of the New Age Movement," in *The New Age Encyclopedia*, ed. J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark, and Aidan A. Kelly (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1990), xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in "News Around the World," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 75 (May 1, 1988): 174.

<sup>14</sup> William McKinney and Wade Clark Roof, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*; cited in "News Around the World," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 76 (April 1, 1989): 134.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Walsh, "Conservative Protestants: Prospering on the Margins," in *New England: Steady Habits Changing Slowly*, ed. Andrew Walsh and Mark Silk, Religion by Region Series (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004), 107-08.

the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Pentecostal Assemblies, and others showed a combined increase of 74% in number of congregations and 48% in members. The author of the study, Martin Schroeder, asked what turned out to be a prophetic question: "Is there not clear indication that we are drawing dangerously close to a situation where other leading [mainline] denominations have reached their point of greatest expansion or have actually begun to shrink?"<sup>16</sup>

One could say that the Mainliners have been declining since the colonial era, when Congregationalists in New England and Anglicans in the south Atlantic region were superseded by upstart Baptists and Methodists. Between 1771 and 1850, while Baptist and Methodist numbers grew at astonishing rates, the once-dominant churches of the colonial period suffered sharp decline: Congregationalists from 20.4% to 4% of church adherents in the United States, Episcopalians from 15.7% to 3.5%, and Presbyterians from 19% to 11.6%.<sup>17</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark concluded that the "upstarts" in the early nineteenth century won America "partly by default": as the early nineteenth century environment increasingly became a religious "free market," the old mainline denominations "failed to meet the competitive challenges and eventually abandoned the market to the upstarts."<sup>18</sup>

With the loss of Mainline predominance has come a corresponding erosion of denominational loyalty. Lyle Schaller observed that in the 1950s it was relatively easy for the pastor of a Lutheran or Methodist or Presbyterian congregation to "push the 'denominational loyalty' button" as the chief motivational factor in raising money for denominational causes or enlisting volunteers to help plant a new congregation or persuade delegates to attend a denominational meeting. While this is still true "for Lutherans or Southern Baptists on what was traditionally their home turf," it is no longer true "for Lutherans in Kentucky or Methodists in Illinois or Presbyterians in Arizona."<sup>19</sup>

Schaller cited six factors behind this decrease in brand or denominational loyalty—none inherently theological: (1) the coming of age of a new generation of consumers; (2) introduction of new brands and products into the market place; (3) increased competition concerning quality, price, and service; (4) the general decline in trust Americans accorded to all institutions of society; (5) the rash of corporate mergers and change in corporate names, making it difficult to maintain loyalty to a particular institution or product; and (6) the entrance of many new firms, some from overseas, into the American market. All six factors "are not irrelevant to the changes that have occurred on the church scene."<sup>20</sup>

Mainliners, called "religious ex-monopolies" by Peter Berger, "can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client population." Allegiance once assumed because of ethnic and denomination ties is now "voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result," Berger concluded, "the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now had to be *marketed* [Berger's word and emphasis]. It must be 'sold' to a clientele that is no longer constrained to 'buy.'" Berger called this change of environment "*a market situation*."<sup>21</sup>

Pockets of Mainline hegemony remain. New England's Protestants, though they have not been the region's numerically dominant group since the middle of the nineteenth century, "still control a disproportionate number of the region's religious buildings" and maintain "a striking visible presence on the landscape."<sup>22</sup> Baptists dominate the southern states from Texas and Oklahoma east to the Atlantic and north to Virginia. Yet, while Southern Baptists once numbered 17 million members in over 40,000 churches, Southern Baptist officials

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Schroeder, *The Lutheran* (March 31, 1943); cited by Martin E. Marty, *Context* 28 (April 1, 1996): 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "How the Upstart Sects Won America, 1776-1850," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28 (1989): 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 103-104.

<sup>19</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *It's a Different World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> Schaller, *It's a Different World*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), 138.

<sup>22</sup> Maria Erling, "Mainline Protestants: Custodians of Community," in *New England: Steady Habits Changing Slowly*, ed. Andrew Walsh and Mark Silk, Religion by Region Series (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004), 90.

acknowledge significant declines in recent denominational funding and programming. After growing steadily from 1930 to 1990, S.B.C. membership has "merely kept pace with population growth" in the last fifteen years.<sup>23</sup> One observer has concluded that the fortune of Baptists in the South offers "a case study in the dynamics affecting numerous religious groups" which struggle to "balance the often conflicting demands of traditional theology, moral rigor, denominational conflict, and waning hegemony over the region's culture."<sup>24</sup>

Roman Catholics maintain a 50% or greater majority in much of Massachusetts; in New York State near Buffalo, and along the Canadian border; in counties in and around Green Bay, Wisconsin, and the Quad cities on the Mississippi River; in western North Dakota, northern Montana, and southern Louisiana; along the Rio Grande in Texas, in large portions of New Mexico and in extreme southern California. There are sizeable percentages of Catholics throughout New England and across the entire upper Midwest.<sup>25</sup>

Baptists are present almost everywhere in the United States. They represent 25-50% of the population in counties beginning almost exactly along the northern state lines of Missouri and Oklahoma south from Texas to the Atlantic Ocean. More than 50% of the population is Baptist in concentrated areas of west Texas, southwest Oklahoma, and scattered counties in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Kentucky.<sup>26</sup>

Methodists too are present in almost all parts of the United States, though in lesser numbers than Baptists. They constitute 10-18% of the population in counties that stretch in a line along the Appalachian mountains from western New York state south to Virginia and Kentucky, as well as in patches throughout the lower Midwest and the South. Greatest Methodist concentration—18-46% of the population—lies in portions of central Iowa and the western parts of Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma.<sup>27</sup>

Presbyterians live mostly in the mid-Atlantic states, throughout Iowa, and in Washington state. Concentrated Presbyterian groupings composing up to 16% of the population appear in Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana, Kansas, Nebraska, and extreme northern Alaska.<sup>28</sup>

Episcopalians, though comprising a far lower percentage of the population, have concentrations of up to 8% of county populations in parts of New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, much of Connecticut, Pennsylvania (especially around Philadelphia), Maryland, northern Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, clusters in Texas, South Dakota, Nebraska, and most of Wyoming. Up to a quarter of the population of some counties of South Dakota is Episcopalian.<sup>29</sup>

Lutherans enjoy supremacy mostly in the upper Midwest, though they are present in small numbers in most of the United States except the deep South. One-quarter to one-half of the population is Lutheran in northern Montana, all of North Dakota, western Minnesota, and parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska. More than 50% of the population is Lutheran in a dozen or so counties each in Minnesota and North Dakota.<sup>30</sup>

It would be easy to blame Catholic decline on the clergy sexual abuse scandal; as of November 2004, the Roman Catholic Church had spent \$772,000,000 on dealing with the scandals—a figure sure to rise over the next decade. But already in 1993, a study by Richard Schoenerr and Lawrence Young predicted that "the Roman Catholic church faces a staggering loss of diocesan priests in the United States as it moves into the 21st century,"<sup>31</sup> and Cathy Lynn Grossman and Anthony De Barros in 2004 concluded that there is "no statistically significant link between the decline in priests and parishes and the scandal." From 1990 to 2003, the number of

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<sup>23</sup> Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 77.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Leonard, "The Southern Crossroads: Religion and Demography," in *Religion and Public Life in the Southern Crossroads: Showdown States*, ed. William Lindsey and Mark Silk, Religion by Region Series (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2005), 36.

<sup>25</sup> "Catholics as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>26</sup> "Baptists as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>27</sup> "Methodists as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>28</sup> "Presbyterians as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>29</sup> "Episcopalians as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>30</sup> "Lutherans as a Percentage of all Residents, 2000," *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.

<sup>31</sup> Richard A. Schoenerr and Lawrence A. Young, *Full Pews, Empty Altars* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), xvii.

"active diocesan and religious-order priests" fell 22%, and there was a nationwide loss of 176 parishes, a 3% drop. Fargo, North Dakota, is in process of closing 23 of its parishes and is short 50 priests for its remaining 158 congregations. The Milwaukee archdiocese closed one-fifth of its parishes between 1995 and 2003.<sup>32</sup>

Yet while there was a decline in priests, Catholic population rose. In the Midwest, for example Catholic population increased by 5%; every state in the region but one had fewer priests but more Catholics in 2002 than in 1990.<sup>33</sup> Catholics are moving from where they were once "thick" in cities in the Northeast and Midwest, to the suburbs, the South, and the Southwest, where they thin out; their numbers hold steady or show slight increases only because Hispanic and Latino/Latina immigration offsets Caucasian losses. While the number of Catholics in Dallas quadrupled, and Catholics are up 137% in Fort Worth and in Raleigh, North Carolina, the Pittsburgh diocese closed 30% of its parishes in 13 years; Springfield, Massachusetts in the same period lost 44% of its parishes, Dubuque 41%; Rochester, New York 40%.<sup>34</sup>

Attendance at mass has fallen precipitously "as each generation has become less religiously observant"—from 44% at mass in 1987 to 41% in 1993 to 37% in 1999 to a projected 33% in 2005. "Like many Americans who view their faith as a cultural flourish, not an active commitment, [many Catholics] rarely go to church." Catholic identity provides "a language and lilt to their prayers but makes little claim on their time, talents or income."<sup>35</sup>

Critics, especially of the most conservative and Evangelical variety, say Mainliners deserve the decline they are experiencing because they remain stubbornly out of step with believing, increasingly conservative Americans. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof noted that 83% of citizens believed in the Virgin Birth of Jesus—and a remarkable 47% of non-Christians also claimed to believe in the Virgin Birth—while only 28% of the citizenry believed in evolution.<sup>36</sup> Critics of the Episcopal church charged in 2003 that its acceptance of an openly homosexual bishop were motivated by a secular gay agenda, rather than genuine Christian concern by and for homosexuals.<sup>37</sup>

Robert Benne has likened the Mainline churches to "dinosaurs" of other kinds—"legacy" airlines such as United, Delta and American; revered national department stores like Sears and Montgomery Ward; and formerly great American newspapers and television networks—that are losing out because of the creation of a better "product" by younger, more aggressive companies, and because of the breakup of once loyal communities into "thousands of subcultures and millions of individuals with weak loyalties to anyone beyond themselves." Benne fears that the mainline denominations "have lost credibility because they are no longer trusted to bring an authoritative message." Especially at "their elite levels," these denominations "have become more and more enamored of a gospel different from the classic one in which God promises deliverance from sin, death, and the devil through Jesus Christ to those who believe his promises." Instead, they spend time and energy fighting sexism, racism, patriarchalism, monoculturalism, "structural injustice," and imperialism. "Parishioners hunger for the Gospel but are offered highly debatable and contentious political opinions"—the "possible effects of the Gospel, not the Gospel itself." Conservative churches, though not without faults of their own, "do not neglect their central callings."<sup>38</sup>

The question now is whether denominations are relevant at all. D. Elton Trueblood (a Quaker, therefore speaking a bit from the outside) wrote that denominations "are not evil" but "simply not important." He saw "no harm in their continued existence" even allowing that "they may do some good that would not otherwise be

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<sup>32</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman and Anthony DeBarros, "Church Struggles with Change," *USA Today*, November 7, 2004; [http://www.usatoday.comJnews/religionJ2004-11-07-church-main\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.comJnews/religionJ2004-11-07-church-main_x.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Jay Dolan, "A Different Breed of Catholics," in *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?* ed. Philip Barlow and Mark Silk, Religion by Region Series (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004), 119-20.

<sup>34</sup> Grossman and DeBarros, "Church Struggles with Change."

<sup>35</sup> Grossman and DeBarros, "Church Struggles with Change."

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof, "Believe It, Or Not," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Martin E. Marty, "The Mainline," *Sightings*, August 25, 2003; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2003/0818.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2003/0818.shtml).

<sup>38</sup> Robert Benne, "The Demise of the Dinosaurs," *The Cresset* (Lent 2006): 58-60.

done." But denominations no longer hold a central position in the Christian stream, but "occupy the side channels."<sup>39</sup>

Julia Mitchell Corbett goes farther, calling ours "a post-denominational religious culture." Distinctions among Protestants, between Protestants and Catholics, and even between Christians and Jews "are not as central to religions in the United States as they were in earlier decades."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps denominations are not viewed as they once were because most of what they do does not make news, and should not. "The displays, reports, and advocacies of the many ministries" at denominational gatherings "show that denominations have changed their role," Martin Marty has observed. "No longer servicing as definers of dogma from which to attack others, they are more like extended families. Despite their family fights, they [still] play significant roles in religious life."<sup>41</sup>

To be continued with a survey of other religions and analysis of the researchers' claims.

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<sup>39</sup> D. Elton Trueblood, *The Banner* (February 28, 1975): 50.

<sup>40</sup> Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Religion in America*, fourth ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 50.

<sup>41</sup> Martin E. Marty, "What is the status of the denomination in American public life?" *Sightings*, August 26, 1999; [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_1999/sightings-082699.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_1999/sightings-082699.shtml).