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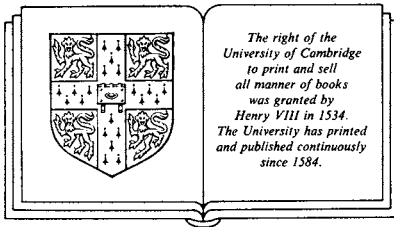
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Religious Diversity and Social Change

American Cities, 1890–1906

KEVIN J. CHRISTIANO

University of Notre Dame



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To my father and my mother

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Preface

In the years immediately preceding the turn of the twentieth century, the United States stood not merely on the threshold of a new chronological period. The nation was poised, more crucially, at the beginning of a radically different era for its social institutions, because trends initiated in this era would ultimately modify many of the structures of American life, shaping contours which persist to this day.

Social change in the latter part of the nineteenth century was as rapid as it was profound. During that time, America had moved increasingly from a native to an immigrant population, from rural to urban residence, and from agricultural to industrial production. As one consequence of this movement, American institutions, whose essential features were determined under more settled circumstances, faced for the first time the task of accommodating the most prominent product of change: greater cultural diversity. Organized religion in particular was severely tested by the urbanization, industrialization, and diversity of American society in this period.

This book provides an account of religion's response, on the structural level, to the new social conditions that arrived with the twentieth century. While not strictly an historical study, it utilizes sophisticated methods of analysis to test propositions which are central to historical writing on religion in the turn-of-the-century period. Because much of what has been published in the past on the history of religion in America is really a brand of intellectual history, this book augments and complements other religious histories with a quantitative assessment of changes taking place in urban populations and their institutions around 1900.

One goal of this study is to explain the effects of the rise of American cities on the religious organizations within them. Statistical models analyze government census data on cities and their churches, probing ways in which the nature and growth of populations, the expansion of manufac-

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turing, and falling levels of illiteracy diversified the religious environments of urban communities. The analyses in addition depict how a form of religious diversity prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century established the bases for competition by and commitment to churches in modern America. Importantly, the religious patterns that resulted can today still be recognized in the denominational system of the United States.

In summary, this study finds that such generic types of social change as population growth and industrialization in themselves had little discernible and consistent influence on the religious profiles of American cities around the turn of the century. Rather, diversity appears more to have been a product of a city having sheltered certain racial or ethnic subcommunities and having supported a culture with widespread literacy. Religious diversity, for its own part, was a condition which inclined cities toward secularization, as well as a catalyst for the consolidation of the parties to nineteenth-century sectarian conflict.

This book was conceived several years ago as a doctoral dissertation in the sociology of religion at Princeton University, though the manuscript has been revised repeatedly since its submission for the degree. Revisions were carried out to promote clarity in expression, to correct minor errors, and to cite research which has only recently come to light. Of these purposes, the first was also the most serious. The text deals in places with matters that are highly technical, even for professionals in sociological research. Yet, because it also combines religious history with social science theory, the manuscript was rewritten for this book with a broader audience in mind. Portions have been revised more than once to improve readability, and the inevitably dense descriptions of method and justifications for technique have been placed almost entirely in notes and appendixes. Trying to make one's work acceptable to one's peers in the discipline is difficult; trying to make it intelligible to others is doubly so. All the same, if more than one kind of reader can actually read this book, the effort will have been worth it.

As scholarly books go, this one is not very long. Nevertheless, it took a long time to produce it, and many people helped along the way. I recognize that to acknowledge the contributions of others to this research by naming them at the start is neither to implicate them necessarily in its results nor to compensate them fully for their trouble.

In candor, I suspect that those who helped, recognize this (especially the part about inadequate rewards) as well as I do. Their cooperation in spite of this foreknowledge is all the more reason why I as the author am bound to repeat that much of the blame for what may be wrong with this study is not theirs. As the author, I alone know how raw this project

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appeared in the imagination, long before it became a book; thus I know as well that much of the credit for any merit to be found in this finished study is not mine. The people I list below, thankfully, intervened.

Foremost among those who deserve mention is Robert Wuthnow. To him I owe intellectual and personal obligations which (like the federal deficit) seem to grow daily, and at a compound rate. Fortunately (and also as with the national debt), payment in full is not expected in the near term. On this project, Wuthnow was the one who first directed me to the Censuses of Religious Bodies and persuaded me not to flinch at the historical study and statistical analyses that would be required to digest the data and to tell their story adequately. More generally, he has been, across the ten years of our association, always careful of thought, calm in judgment, and generous with praise.

Robert C. Liebman was instrumental in demonstrating to me how I could better integrate this study's historical contents and sociological themes. He provided attentive and detailed comments on drafts of all the chapters, even when a transatlantic research trip of his own loomed. Not incidentally, these comments were accompanied at all times by ample doses of good humor.

Throughout the writing of this work, John F. Wilson proved to be a temperate and judicious critic. His careful attention to this project often led him to suggest further authorities for me to consult, or alternative arguments with which I ought to contend. Above all, he maintained a sense of charity while he managed this sociologist's instruction in the subtlety of the historian's craft.

I was fortunate, as this work took shape, to have taken part in an informal discussion group in which sociologists shared some results of their research and addressed common problems. Among the participants in this group were Karen A. Cerulo, Muge Gocek, Beth Kaplowitz, William G. Lehrman (who drew my attention to the data available in the Censuses of Manufactures), Ann Shola Orloff, Laura Shill Schragger, Catherine Leeco Stern, Steven Wemer (who offered several helpful references on statistical procedures), and David E. Woolwine. I thank them all.

At least four segments of this work were delivered, in preliminary form, as papers at meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Association for the Sociology of Religion, or the Social Science History Association. Albion M. Urdank, Richard Perkins, and Marsha Rosenblit acted as discussants at these sessions, where they contributed much constructive criticism, not all of which I could incorporate in the book. In addition, a number of scholars read an early report of the findings and graciously commented on it. Stanley Lieberson described how I could adapt for use with church membership data the linguistic diversity measures he has refined, and Gregory Holmes Singleton explained to me

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how he analyzed diversity in his own dissertation, a study of Protestantism in Los Angeles between 1850 and 1930.

Besides the persons noted above, James R. Beniger, Kathleen Biddick, Jay P. Dolan, Maureen T. Hallinan, Martin E. Marty, John R. Sutton, Andrew J. Weigert, and Michael J. White discussed my research with me at various moments and freely gave of their time to help me to improve it. Each was able to see some things in this work worth talking about, and these exchanges, in turn, kept me talking – and thinking in between.

All the while that I talked and thought, Robert S. Cox, John F. Kuzloski, and Wesley M. Shrum neither ignored the obligation they bore as my colleagues to criticize my work nor dismissed the inclination they shared as my friends to respect what it meant to me. They were perhaps less delicate than I in handling matters to which rules were attached, but in no important sense were they ever really cavalier.

This project commenced in the last of three years of financial support that I received from the National Science Foundation (NSF) under its predoctoral fellowship program in sociology. For one year thereafter, I was designated a Charlotte Elizabeth Procter Honorific Fellow by the Fellowship Subcommittee of the Faculty Committee on the Graduate School of Princeton University. Much later, preparation of the manuscript for the publisher was completed at Princeton – where it all began – during the first weeks of a year I enjoyed on leave from my teaching responsibilities at the University of Notre Dame. My return to Princeton as a Visiting Fellow was occasioned by a kind invitation from the Department of Sociology and its chairman, Marvin Bressler. I wish to thank the NSF, Princeton, and Notre Dame for the assistance that each institution has extended to me over the course of this research.

Back at Princeton, Clifford I. Nass furnished expert advice about dealing with the mainframe computer, aid that was above and beyond even his own elevated standard of duty to users of that machine. Cynthia Gibson typed many of the more complicated tables in the manuscript with diligence and dispatch.

A host of other friends served this work and its author importantly by resonating, in their conversation and their laughter, a sound that Hawthorne identified as “the echo of God’s own voice, pronouncing ‘It is well done.’” Ann and Rick Blanc, Joe and Moy Burns, Calum Carmichael, Michelle Alberti Gambone, Sarah Hewins, Bill Lehrman, and Mark Stanton all fell (or were pushed) into this role, and they never (or seldom) complained.

Finally, I must thank my siblings (this time by name, they demanded): Steve, Patty, Maureen, and Donna. Along with our parents, to whom this book is dedicated, they have assumed with unflinching patience the bur-

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dens of harboring an academic like me. They endure them, and me, rather well.

An article of mine, drawn in part from Chapters 2 and 3, examines the historical origins of the data used in this book, inspects the data for accuracy, and suggests how the information on denominations that they contain may allow a reconsideration of the historical role of organized religion in American society. That article was published in *Social Science History* 8 (Fall, 1984): 341–370. I am grateful to James Q. Graham, Jr. and Robert P. Swierenga, managing editors of this journal, for granting permission to reprint here most of my earlier essay.

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