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William M. Newman, Peter L. Halvorson. *Atlas of American Religion: The Denominational Era, 1776-1990.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. 176 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-0345-8.

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Newman and Halvorson have undertaken two daunting tasks in their *Atlas of American Religion.* First, they have counted and mapped adherents to the major Christian traditions and Judaism from 1776 to 1990. Second, they have organized these leading traditions into five distinct categories based on size, distribution, and, to some extent, beliefs. The result is the best historical atlas of Christianity in America that I have seen, and a valuable update from Gaustad's work of the early 1960s. Newman and Halvorson have done fine work in the counting and their numbers may well be the standard for some time to come. Their typology is more open for debate.

Edwin Gaustad attempted a similar task a generation ago, mapping church membership and numbers of churches in his *Historical Atlas of Religion in America.*[1] Gaustad's approach provided ways to measure institutional growth within a denomination, but limited comparison between institutions. The greatest difficulty was that different denominations define "membership" differently, thus membership comparisons were limited to those institutions that have similar requirements for that status. Most especially, those who included baptized children as members could not easily be compared with those who did not.

Newman and Halvorson employed a method which can allow more extensive comparisons between institutions. Most importantly, they used a stable, systematic way to count people from different religious traditions. The authors drew on Johnson, Picard, and Quinn, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971*, which provides a method for shifting from "members" to "adherents."[2] For churches that do not count unbaptized youth as members, their formula adjusts membership upwards in proportion to the county population below age fourteen. The resulting number of "adherents," although only an estimate of the faithful, allows for more accurate comparison than does the number of members.

After a brief nod to colonial and revolutionary churches, Newman and Halvorson selected four dates at which to count adherents: 1850, 1890, 1952, and 1990. In 1850, two sources were available to count the faithful: the 1850 United States Census, and the *Baptist Almanac and Annual Register*. The 1890 United States Census is a particularly valuable source of information on American religions and so that was chosen to represent the turn of the century. The Census Bureau abandoned religious enumeration after World War II, so the data for the middle twentieth century came from the *Yearbook of American Churches*, published by the National Council of Churches of Christ. A similar church membership study for 1990 was used to measure religious adherence at the end of the century.

From these were chosen the thirty-nine religious organizations for which comparable data was available over the time frame. Newman and Halvorson are quite cognizant of the various uncertainties and inconsistencies in their data base, and take the time to be sure the reader understands these, as well. The discussion of the data sources is nicely managed: brief enough to avoid tedium, yet thorough enough to clarify what the options were and why the authors chose the route they did. The most obvious holes in the data include the historically black churches (the National Baptist Convention USA is the largest, with over seven million members), the Orthodox churches, and all non-Christian faiths except Judaism. (Black churches, the Orthodox churches, and a few others did not participate in the private church membership counts of the middle and late twentieth century). However, in the end, the authors rightly conclude that "these data represent both the best available and the only available" (51), so they may as well be used, even with some trepidation.

The data for each organization was tabulated to show the following: total adherents; total counties with one church or more; and the percent counties in a region (Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, and West) with one church or more. From this the authors grouped orga-

nizations into a five-fold typology: national denominations, multiregional denominations, multiregional sects, classic sects, and national sects. Four criteria were used to categorize each organization: size (number of adherents); spatial extent (percentage of counties with at least one church); spatial distribution (percentage of counties within each region with at least one church); and finally "cultural normativeness" (58).

Thus, to take one example, the national denominations are very large organizations (one million or more adherents). They have a church in at least two-thirds of the nation's counties. They are widely distributed, having a church in at least fifty percent of the counties in each of the four regions. And finally, they exhibit values that reflect the mainstream of America, values which are accepted as normal in the culture at large. The national denominations include the Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, the Assemblies of God, and the Churches of Christ.

Multiregional denominations are culturally normative, but are smaller and exhibit a more limited extent and distribution. Sects differ from denominations in that they espouse values that are not normative; usually this means the church either retains an ethnic identity (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), or a lifestyle that challenges the mainstream culture (the Mennonite Church). Sects also usually have a significantly smaller size, with a highly regional distribution. The Mormons are classified as a national sect. Although large (over three million adherents), they are mostly a western organization, and espouse values that are not seen as mainstream.

The authors devote the first third of the book to a discussion of the sources, methods, and typology. The rest of the book contains one to three page descriptions of each organization, a brief history of that group, and the reasons for its classification. Along with each written description are two maps, one showing the distribution of total adherents in 1990 (by county), and the other showing geographic change (by county) during the four years in question: 1850, 1890, 1952, and 1990.

I like the way the authors handle the numbers. The numerical methods outlined above are carefully treated and explained. However, the intellectual or theological divisions are not, and this absence leads to my most significant question for the authors: what is "culturally normative" or "mainstream?" Unfortunately, there is no extended discussion of what this is, what it might be, or what it might have been in the past. At one point the authors parallel "mainstream" with "civil religion," further muddying the waters. "Civil religion" is only coincidentally related to Christianity, and is usually limited to features of the political or national history and ritual that have taken on a structural resemblance to religion. Defining or describing mainstream religious values would be rather difficult, especially given the diversity of the seven national denominations listed above, but the absence of a description means that the only criteria left for making tough calls are the numbers.

The mainstream/sectarian division emerges from an older way of classifying European organizations into churches and sects. "Churches" were the institutions which enjoyed state support and a large, bureaucratic organization, and which served as the depository for the national values. "Sects," on the other hand, were smaller groups of outsiders who challenged the values of the nation and the established church. Newman and Halvorson consciously abandoned part of this typology as a European relic which did not fit in the democratic American arena. The "established church" of Europe became the "denomination" in America. The word "sect" was retained, although redefined, and I think this retention was unfortunate. "Sect" still carries with it connotations (which the authors recognize) of encysted minorities fighting off the larger culture, or of radicals who don't fit (141, 147.) The authors challenge these connotations, but I think a new term is needed to reflect the growing acceptance of diverse values, or simply to reflect the pluralism found in the change from "church" to "denomination." Why should one minority theology should be labeled non-normative, while another minority theology is not? One example will suffice. Newman and Halvorson recognize that the pentecostal theology of the Assemblies of God is non-normative (88). However, this group is called a denomination because its distribution is fairly wide, like that of other denominations. On the other hand, Jews have three times as many members as the Assemblies of God, and are arguable a far stronger presence in national politics, economics, and culture. Their values are non-normative, like the Assemblies of God. However, they are classified as a sect, for reasons which are not fully clear, but which seem to be tied to their regional distribution. Ideas such as "mainstream" and "non-normative" are difficult to work with in a nation as religiously diverse as the United States, and the old language with its negative connotations only exacerbates the problem. The real criteria in this book are the numbers, not the values.

This book deserves to be read by those interested in numerical methods used to study religious history. It will be a valuable reference book for researchers in various

stages of thought and work and needs to be in academic libraries. The numbers in this book will likely serve as a reference point for future study, for the numerical methods are careful, clear, and consistent. Indeed, the typology may stand on the numbers alone. However, the separation of denomination from sect based on undefined mainstream values needs further discussion.

Notes

[1]. Edwin Scott Gaustad. *Historical Atlas of Religion in America.* New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

[2]. Douglas Johnson, Paul Picard, and Bernard Quinn. *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971.* Washington, D. C.: Glenmary Research Center, 1974.

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