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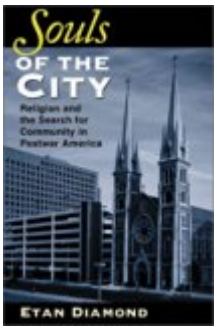
Etan Diamond. *Souls of the City: Religion and the Search for Community in Postwar America.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. xii + 199 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-34256-0.



Reviewed by James J. Divita

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Religion and Community in the "All-American City"

Studies emanating from William Dobriner and James Kunstler to Duany, Benfield, and Suarez have analyzed the relationship of religion and metropolis. Noted were subtopics like the ongoing conversation between inner city and suburbia, and the competition between a rising conservative Protestantism (fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal) and declining mainline Protestantism. Etan Diamond's book fits into that genre well. Using Indianapolis as the case study, he concludes that the religious development and search for community in this smaller, Midwestern city better fit the metropolis than generalizations arising from the study of Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles.

The Polis Center at IUPUI (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis), funded by a Lilly Endowment grant, employed Diamond as researcher and writer for five years to study the big picture of Indianapolis religion after World War Two. This book is the product of his labors.

Diamond focused on three issues in city-religious matters. He found that metropolitan change affected religious change, and vice-versa. By the early twentieth century, loyalty to one group created community; but it also separated one community from another. Interest in education or temperance affected cities until the presence of immigrants engendered overt evangelization and Americanization programs on the part of their native hosts.

The self-image of suburban, urban, and rural residents reflected their differing religious experiences and their images of each other. The suburban resident viewed the city as that other, nearby place where life was complicated and ever threatened. Industrialization and urbanization complicated the urban resident's view of religion, even more complex with the development of an inner city and an attractive, outlying area after 1945. The rural resident wanted to preserve the traditional and customary, and believed the city stood for the major corrupting influences in society.

Accompanying change which affected them, all three elements sought to preserve or to

reestablish some sort of community within the metropolis. In an age of television and blandness, conservative Protestantism spread to challenge mainline Protestantism, the uprooted formed megachurches, and urban ministries stressed providing social services. Churches became the best hope for the revival of community.

Taking an overall look today, urban religion is characterized by contradiction and tension. Indianapolis is a mixture of small town and big city, and religious patterns continue to show economic and social differences. The church is called on to provide a sense of community, because congregations are social magnets and geographically rooted destinations. Ironically, the two best known figures of the period turn out to be Jim Jones of Guyana fame and Greg Dixon, believer in total church freedom from the state.

Two reading publics will delve into Diamond's work. One will be those interested in the role of religion in society and in religious history. The other will be those interested in Indianapolis's historical development, especially religion over time, on which comparatively little has appeared. The Polis Center was founded to encourage research and study in order to understand better the city's life and times; therefore, Diamond's contribution is linked to the purpose of the Polis Center. What can we learn about Indianapolis and its religious life from him?

The author sees the Hoosier capital as essentially an Anglo-Protestant metropolis lacking the extent of diversity found in larger cities. Despite the establishment of Unigov (unified city-county government) in 1970, groupings which are not Anglo-Protestant are peripheral and complicate the development of community through religion. Consequently, much of the author's attention is spent on the role and movements within Indianapolis's Protestantism. His initial assumption demands that he follow this method to gauge the strength or weakness of community.

The major illustration of a Jewish presence in Indianapolis is a map (p. 85). Diamond never explains why Jewish people and houses of worship and institutions all moved from the south side to the far north side (p. 111). Community sense or xenophobia?

Catholics, the largest single denomination in Marion County, receive about the same attention. Yet they fit into the story of the religious tie between city and future suburbia. Diamond is aware that priests celebrated Mass in private homes in rural Marion County (p. 30), but he does not report that Mass was celebrated in outlying Valley Mills, Acton, and Augusta after the 1870s. Frame church buildings existed in Valley Mills until around 1900 and in Acton from 1881 until the 1930s. The map showing parish growth into outlying areas (p. 29) is inadequate because light shades are difficult to distinguish and because parish boundaries are obscured in the dark areas of the map. He summarizes the story of race relations, but he does not point out that unlike many Protestant churches that relocated from inner city to suburbia, the Catholic Church has a mixed record. Its inner-city schools consolidated to survive and its high schools moved to outlying areas, while a new Holy Angels elementary school was built for African American children. Six parishes merged or closed, two of them in 1994, while the Archdiocese financially assisted several others. African American majorities attended two Catholic churches after World War Two (p. 118), but as early as 1938, with the formulation of a Catholic school integration policy, African Americans attended about one third of the Catholic churches in this otherwise segregated city.

Diamond defines the role of African Americans in affecting religion and community, but he has little to say about the role of Appalachians and nothing to say about the relation of European, Asian, and Hispanic ethnics to the story of religion and community. Ethnic consciousness is worthy of the author's study because it exists in

Indianapolis and contributes to community. Orthodox Christianity is ignored, yet Lebanese/Syrians and Greeks sponsor community-enriching, popular summer festivals. Several Protestant and Catholic churches periodically conduct services in the old languages, and the Italian street festival and the Irish Fest include a religious component. Only in regard to Hispanics can we excuse the author's silence, for the thousands resident in the city are very recent arrivals (since the mid-1990s).

Not only is Diamond silent on ethnics, but also on the place and influence of civic religion. Indianapolis seems to possess more patriotic and governmental symbols than any other major city outside of Washington, D.C. The normal structures related to a state capital exist here, but we also honor the nation's military heroes. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument graces the very center of the city; the "shrine room and altar of sacrifice" in the World War Memorial exudes a spiritual atmosphere. World War Two and Asian conflicts have their own memorials. A recent addition is a series of tablets honoring Congressional Medal of Honor winners. Indianapolis is also national headquarters to the American Legion. If we seek to understand the soul of the city and search for community, should we not look for the place of civic religion, too?

The third silence is the city's unchurched majority. Over half of Marion County's residents do not hold membership in any denomination. If the unchurched are more than the dispossessed or loners and are real unbelievers or uninterested in religion, and we are investigating the nature of religion in a community, their presence forces us to consider what effect they have on the search for community.

Because Diamond gives so much religious data about Indianapolis, the story is in the details. Minor errors make for major distractions. Haste in writing may have caused the problem, but the author's editors at the Polis Center and Indiana University Press did not solve it. Many geographical errors appear, perhaps arising from unfamiliarity with the city. Keystone Road (p. 32) is really Keystone Avenue and College Street (map, p. 98) is really College Avenue. Clermont is located northeast of Indianapolis (p. 69) when it is actually west of the city. Second Presbyterian Church is sited east of Meridian Street (p. 106) when it is on the west side of that major artery. Diamond locates Northwood Christian Church on 56th Street in Broad Ripple (p. 31); rather, it is on 46th Street and nowhere near Broad Ripple. North-south roads on the east side of Marion County are faulted for not bearing Indianapolis city names (p. 71) when their names predate the city's expansion into that area. Outside of geographical errors, the city appears to be the owner of the World War Memorial (p. 106), when it is actually owned by the state. This reviewer's history of St. Christopher Catholic parish is listed with an incorrect author and title in the book's footnotes and bibliography.

The silences and minor errors delineated in the book may reflect Diamond's short residence in Indianapolis. The Lilly grant was not extended, so he completed the book after leaving the Polis Center and the city. If he had been retained, he would have had the time and incentive to address the silences and correct the minor errors himself. Instead, he published the research materials already gathered on the Protestant churches, and gave us this limited study of our community's religious soul. The book is worthwhile--as far as it goes.

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