Geographies of Religions and Belief Systems

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From the Editor

The birth of a new journal is always an exciting time for the academic world, and we are proud to announce a new venture in the study of the geography of religion and belief systems. This project dates from discussions among board members of the Geography of Religion and Belief Systems Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers after the annual meeting at New Orleans in 2003. That meeting saw a renewed interest in the group and its areas of study after several less active years, and the founding of a journal was an attractive project for several reasons. First, it would make the group and its research more visible both within the specialty group and in the wider academic world. Second, it would provide an outlet for all persons interested in the geography of religions and belief systems to publish their work and make it accessible. Third, it would give members of the group a common project to create a greater sense of community.

We determined to take advantage of modern technology and publish online only. An online journal is obviously cheaper to produce, avoiding costs of printing and postage. Handling the submission and review processes online is also less expensive and faster than using hardcopy delivery systems. Online publication also offers greater flexibility, as we are not bound to any specific length or number of printed pages. We can easily use illustrations, including color. An online journal is also accessible to a much wider audience, as there are no subscriptions. Anyone can go to the Web site and read the material.

We determined that Geographies of Religions and Belief Systems seeks to forward the geographic study of religion and belief systems through the publication of high-quality peer-reviewed articles and book reviews showcasing research frontiers, methods and methodologies, pedagogy, and relevant advances in complimentary disciplines. The journal publishes articles with diverse topical foci, variable epistemological, theoretical, and methodological approaches, and a range of researchers, from accomplished senior scholars to those in early career stages. While many journals publish articles related to the geography of religions and other belief systems, we seek to provide a central venue in which these diverse threads can come together.

Initially, the plan is to publish one issue per year, and herewith we present the first year’s issue. If the volume of high-quality contributions warrants, the frequency may change in the future. Submissions are welcome at any time.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge several colleagues whose help has been invaluable in launching this project and in preparing this first issue. Michael Ferber, who was chair of the Geography of Religion and Belief Systems Specialty Group during the early
discussion and planning phases and serves as Managing Editor, has been a wonderful support and prod, especially regarding the technological side of the venture. Robert Stoddard has handled the book reviews, a challenging task for a journal that is just getting underway. Our editorial board consists of John Corrigan, Julian Holloway, Lily Kong, David Ley, David Livingstone, Carolyn Prorok, James Shortridge, and Roger Stump.

We hope you enjoy the first issue of Geographies of Religions and Belief Systems and will consider submitting your work for future issues.

Elizabeth J. Leppman
Editor
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Heaven On Earth: The Shakers and their Space

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the nature of theological space and its production by examining the spatial practices of the religious sect known as the Shakers as they existed in the nineteenth century. This millennial sect worked to establish heaven on earth, building nineteen communities across the northeastern and Midwestern United States according to the precepts of the Shaker theology. Their theology was centered in their belief that the Shaker villages would be the locus of God’s kingdom on earth. The Shakers produced their space by regulating the appearance of the villages – by conforming the village layout and architecture to the precepts of their theology and by reinforcing the tenets of their theology by restricting contact between the sect’s members and citizens of the world at large.

INTRODUCTION

Landscapes are at the heart of cultural geography and cultural geographers study the reciprocal process between culture and landscape. Inherent in the culture-landscape dialectic is the notion of landscape as medium for social, historical and political relationships that are often expressed in the creation of public statuary.

Mitchell (1995) called culture “an identifiable process, an analytic category, a mappable level or sphere. For all cultural geographers culture exists” (emphasis in original) (103). The backbone of cultural geography is culture that “is socially constructed, highly mediated and causative” (103).

His conception of culture is part of a new cultural geography which is more engaged with the processes and social relationships, including theology and religion-based interactions, than the cultural geography that had limited itself to the description of the imprint of the culture on the landscape (Sauer) or the vernacular landscape (J. B. Jackson). This new cultural geography denies the superorganic view of culture practiced by Zelinsky.

Landscape meaning arises out of the social and political realms, and although they produce physical space, the process is more important than the outcome (Olwig 1996). The emphasis on the political and cultural context in landscape meaning takes landscape analysis to a new theoretical level. The idea of space as a socially produced entity has challenged scholars to go beyond the outcome of those processes.

Schein (1997) characterized landscapes as social relationships materialized. He relies on Duncan’s use of discourse analysis to accommodate the several views of a cultural landscape from different actors. For complex landscapes, such as the one here, Shein’s framework adds structure to the landscape. More than the landscape being the sum of its parts, Schein’s landscape contains competing social relations as a place of overlapping discourses (663).
The cultural landscape created by the Shakers involves social relationships not only within the Shaker village but also between the Shaker village and the outside world. The theology of the Shakers is the framework for the creation of their landscape. This paper addresses the landscape through this framework. It begins by reviewing the history of the Shakers and the methods used to analyze the landscape. This is followed by a consideration of the concepts of theological space. These sections lead up to a discussion of the manifestations of Shaker theology within their landscape.

THE SHAKERS

The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, better known as the Shakers, is a communitarian group that originated in England and migrated to America in 1774. It is a Christian sect that significantly diverges from mainstream Christianity. The Shakers believe that Christ has already returned to earth, as promised in the Bible, and that he has established an embryonic Kingdom of God within the Shaker sect. Christ himself, they believe, came as Mother Ann Lee, their early and most charismatic leader.

The Shakers were focused upon perfecting themselves, which they believed was possible within the confines of their villages; once they were perfect, God’s kingdom would come in full and it would come as a Shaker village. The village, therefore, played a critical role in the task of perfection. It was a proleptic expression of the Kingdom of God; that is, the kingdom was, at one and the same time, now and not yet. Christ had returned but the full instantiation of his kingdom was yet to come.

Their practices derived from these beliefs. Their doctrine was founded upon five main points – celibacy and gender equality, community, confession, charism (a miraculously given power or insight), and millennialism (a belief that the kingdom of God would soon be established on earth).

The Shakers were best known for their energetic and spirit-possessed worship. As early as 1769, while they were still in England, the Virginia Gazette reported on the strange new sect that was known for shaking, screeching, singing and dancing, and apparent visions and spirit possession in worship services that lasted for hours (Correspondent 1769). It was this behavior that caused the nickname Shaker to be assigned to the sect.

The Shakers were an extraordinary people, with idealistic visions for the possibility of the future. Heaven on earth was their consistent goal. Their villages reflect this single-minded purpose and the effort with which they pursued their goal. All but one of the villages are now closed. Sabbathday Lake in Maine has four members.

METHODS

Studies in the geography of religion benefit from methods that are historical in substance and qualitative in style. Qualitative research methods enable geographers to examine materials that are narrative, subjective, or emotional in nature and to draw the materials together into a structured and carefully designed framework that reveals information about the way people

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More than two hundred years later, the Shakers exist as a tiny community of four at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. While this group continues the theology of the founders, it has necessarily modernized itself in a number of ways. This research is focused upon the historical Shakers and a particular village they founded in the nineteenth century; for this reason, they will be referred to in the past tense from this point.
interact with space in ways that quantitative methods may not be able to match. A qualitative study that is also historically grounded yields insights into the reasons why and how those who preceded us produced the landscapes with which we interact today. Social space maintains its historical characteristics even as new forms of the space are produced, making it imperative that we study not merely the practices of the past but also the spatiality of those practices (Peet 1998).

The research for this project was grounded in historical and qualitative methods. The Shakers are prolific writers and have produced numerous sources for researchers to use; they continue to publish a journal with articles about their theology, their daily lives, and their understandings of history and their place in it. These primary sources were invaluable in this study. Those used in addition to the modern journals included the Pleasant Hill Spiritual Journal and Church Record Books, personal letters and journals written by Pleasant Hill residents, a wealth of historical photos, collections by Shaker of Shaker memories, collections of sermons, and writings by visitors, including David Lamson and the artist/writer Benson Lossing.

The historical data were gathered from a number of sources. Although Pleasant Hill, Kentucky was selected as the case study, visits to a number of other villages, including Hancock, Massachusetts, Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and Canterbury and Enfield, New Hampshire Shaker Villages, reinforced the conclusions reported here. These villages were rejected in favor of Pleasant Hill Shaker Village because many of the buildings in those villages were originally used for other purposes, whereas the village at Pleasant Hill was built from scratch as a Shaker village. In addition to fieldwork at Shaker villages, the librarians and curators of the Shaker collections at the historical libraries of Winterthur, Harrodsburg (Kentucky) Historical Society, the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio, the Library of Congress, and the libraries at Pleasant Hill, Sabbathday Lake, and Hancock Shaker Villages provided extensive assistance in the use of primary sources. The data gathered from on-site visits included architectural details and village layout. The historical records and personal interview provided a picture of the customary practices and daily movements of the village residents. An in-depth understanding of Shaker theology and eschatology came from discussions with Brother Arnold Hadd (a member of Sabbathday Lake), from sermons and other writings of Shaker leaders and visitors to Shaker villages, and from the Shaker Millennial Laws, the documents that provide guidelines for daily behavior.

The Millennial Laws were first issued in 1821 although the concepts expressed had been in place since the early Shaker period. The first leaders, including Mother Ann, Father Joseph, and Mother Lucy, resisted attempts to issue written statements of Shaker theology, but it is often the case that the further a group is from its founders, the more desirous the group is of codifying its beliefs and practices. Just six months after the death of Mother Lucy, the first laws were issued. They were laws only in the sense that they expressed the Shaker theology. Individual villages were given permission to adapt the laws as needed according to the time and place in which the village existed.

A case study was used in order to get a narrowly focused view of a society that seemed to exhibit the characteristics of a theologically based community. A homogenous, historical community that separated from the world in order to pursue its religion built the Shaker village of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Since the society was communal and detached from the greater world, the external influences that would normally impact a study of this nature were absent, providing a clear view of the way the society produced its space.
THEOLOGICAL SPACE

Theology is one of the most closely held aspects of the human condition; what one believes about God directly impacts interactions not only with society but also with the earth. The societal organization of space reflects these beliefs (Lane 1998), and discussions of space and place should include the concept of a deity and the deity’s influence upon the production of space. The concept of deity varies from religion to religion, but in general maintains its power as a place-producer. The beliefs of a particular religion are modes of action with respect to the production of space (Firth 1948).

Theological space is that space produced by societies according to their religious beliefs. Usually this space falls into the idea of place as Tuan defines it – place is space that has been given value through personal experience (1977). As “place,” theological space embodies the history of its occupants. It has memory; it subsumes the history, culture, values, and beliefs of its occupants and carries embodiment of the culture to new generations (Brueggeman 2002).

World religions are generally understood to be either universalizing (those who proselytize and do not require fixed locations for worship) or ethnic (those who do not seek converts and are identified with a particular tribal or ethnic group). Ethnic religions are more fixed in location and, with the exception of Judaism, diffuse slowly while universalizing religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are diffused throughout the world (Park 1994).

The Shakers are set in a curious position between the poles of universalizing and ethnic religions. As Christians, they proselytize, diffuse, and expect God to set up his kingdom through Jesus, but their worship is confined to specific spaces, not unlike the worship of ethnic religions. In fact, their spatial practices are more in keeping with the Old Testament and Judaism or New Testament monasticism than with modern Christian evangelicalism.

The concept of space is a theme that underlies the entire Bible (Brueggeman 2002). In the Old Testament, these concepts illustrate the way in which ancient tribal peoples understood the nature of space. While all space was understood to have been divinely created (Eliade 1957), some places were holier than others. Yahweh told Moses, for example, to remove his sandals for “the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:4-6 New Revised Standard Version). The Shaker idea that God would reside in their village parallels the beliefs of ethnic religions. When the people of Israel were being forced into exile in Babylon, they were certain that Yahweh would never find them there because he lived in the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel taught them that Yahweh would go ahead of them into exile, an incipient notion of diffusion that foreshadows the universalizing traits of Christianity (Ezekiel 9-12). The Shakers may also have understood the lesson learned by the returning exiles that separatism is a way to save oneself and one’s land (Brueggeman 2002). When the people returned from Babylon, they walled themselves in, both physically and figuratively, in order to reduce the temptation to syncretism that had been their downfall. Reconstruction of Israel required purification of their practices and their land and this was facilitated by separating themselves from the world at large (Brueggeman 2002).

The Shakers began at this point, building villages that would be pure and holy and separate from the temptations of the world. They established themselves as a religious community who retreated from the world in order to realize their goal of preparing themselves for the kingdom they believed that God was establishing on earth. The villages they created became sacred places invested with their theology.
PLEASANT HILL SHAKER VILLAGE

Pleasant Hill (Figure 1) was established in central Kentucky in 1806 after missionaries from the central ministry at Mount Lebanon, New York spread the Shaker message in the region. The founding members initially settled upon one hundred forty acres of land that fronted upon Shawnee Run, later called Shaker Creek. Elisha Thomas, one of the new converts, owned the land. They soon moved to higher ground, possibly because of flooding from the creek.

The new location was one and one-half miles east of the creek and it was here that the new Society built a complete village. At its height, Pleasant Hill was situated on more than seven thousand acres (Neal 1982). Most of the land was dedicated to farming and livestock operations. The built portion of the village was situated more or less in the center of the property with a greenbelt of farmland surrounding it (Figure 2).

The setting for the new village was very beautiful. The gently rolling land was fertile and ready for crops. The Kentucky River ran nearby, with its towering palisades. Shawnee Run flowed beside the quarry from which the Shakers obtained the stone needed for the new buildings. In a letter sent back to the central ministry, a writer described the region as “a thick settled place,” with “a great deal of beautiful land, level & rich” (Samuel 1809).
Figure 2. Pleasant Hill (Shakertown) surrounded by farmland.
ANALYSIS OF PLEASANT HILL

Pleasant Hill’s layout and the designs of its buildings both resulted from and in turn shaped the interactions of its residents. The village was uniquely designed to provide visual connections to the underlying theology.

The architect of Pleasant Hill was himself a Shaker. Micajah Burnett was seventeen years old in 1809 when his parents brought him to live with the Shakers. Just six years later, at age twenty-three, he began to design the village. Shaker style was defined from the beginning by their unswerving focus upon the goal of creating heaven on earth. Functionality was everything. Building designs could be both functional and beautiful, but the beauty had to be inherent in the design itself; it could not come from elements that served no other useful purpose. Guidelines for the faith called the Millennial Laws would later read, “Beadings, mouldings [sic] and cornices, which are merely for fancy, may not be made by Believers” (Hadd 1996). In spite of this prohibition, or perhaps because of his personal faith in the principle, Burnett succeeded in bringing beauty within simplicity to the village structures. The staircases in the Trustees Building (Figure 3) have been pointed out as examples of a unique design that exists “nowhere else in Shakerdom” (Nicoletta 1995). It would later be written in the Millennial Laws that the Shakers “should not deviate widely from the common styles of buildings” (Hadd 1996). Burnett was a genius at applying Shaker principles to the Federal style of architecture and design popular in Kentucky at the time. Burnett’s designs reflect Shaker theology according to the tenets of their religious beliefs.

Expressions of Separateness

During the life of the village, the Shakers built about 266 structures at Pleasant Hill, including all the barns, sheds, cisterns, and other necessities for village life. The economic sectors in a Shaker village were complete enough to supply all the needs for the people with enough left over to sell or trade to the people of the world. Among the active industries at Pleasant Hill were milling (sawmill, fulling mill, grist mill and oil mill), farming and animal husbandry, clothing (cobblers, wool preparation (carding), and sewing), crafts (blacksmith, wagon maker, quarrying, masonry, builders, brick makers, and furniture makers), herb growing, business, and cooking and housekeeping.

Their total self-sufficiency was intentional. The Shakers deliberately separated themselves from the world for two reasons. First, and perhaps foremost, they were working to perfect themselves so that they could bring about heaven on earth. They believed that separation from the world was necessary in order to lessen temptation and to keep the individual Shaker focused upon the task of perfection. Trustees were appointed to manage the temporal affairs of the village. These were senior members of the Society who, it was felt, either would not be as affected by contact with the worldly people, or perhaps were already perfected and thus immune from potential contamination. The Millennial Laws were available to assist them in determining just how much interaction with the world was too much. Ordinary Shakers were required to obtain permission from their Deacons and Elders before leaving the village; if permission was granted for an excursion, upon their return they had to account for their activities during the time away from the village. While they were away, they were not allowed to interact too closely with the outside people. The 1821 version of the Millennial Laws identified specific activities that were forbidden.

No one is allowed for the sake of curiosity, to go into the world’s meeting houses, prisons, or towers, nor to go on board of vessels, nor to see shoes [sic], or any such things as are calculated to attract the mind and lead it away from the love & fear of God (Johnson 1969).

This proscription was still in effect in the 1887 version of the Laws, but the language was moderated from complete prohibition to a moral concern: “It is not good order for Believers to attend theaters, or shows, to gratify an idle curiosity” (Hadd 1996).

Second, the principle of community itself was a tenet of their theology and they formed their own village in order to practice it. In their effort to model themselves after the primitive church, the Shakers focused upon Acts 2:44-45: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (NRSV). Shaker communalism was based upon the idea that the best system of government for a community is “the union between the head and the body of the people” (White and Taylor 1905). The head of the Shakers was God; the body, the Shakers themselves, was governed by God speaking to them through their anointed leaders. The Shakers thus lived in a theocracy in which the ideal of community expressed itself as a communitarian system. In their quest for perfection, the Shakers sought to eliminate any concern for their personal needs and to replace it with a concern for others. “The desire to die to self leads the Shaker quite naturally to the pooling of goods” (Shakerism for Today 1963). If the individual had no concern for himself or herself, then that individual had no need of personal goods. Whatever he or she owned could
easily be given up to the use of the entire community. Sister Frances recalled that this
commonality of goods extended even to the children they took in.

As children outgrew clothing, it was put in this closet, and was available for other
children to wear. Many children came to the Shaker Community with only the clothes they
wore. This communal closet always had dresses for the girls who needed them (Carr 1995).

The nature of their separation of the world was apparent to the villagers because of the
restrictions on travel and interaction with the world’s people. A visual indicator of these
strictures existed in the Trustees’ Building. This building was constructed for the express
purpose of interfacing with the world. The Trustees’ Office was a structure in every village; the
one in Pleasant Hill is especially beautiful (Figure 4).

This building was more than just a place of business; it was a symbol of the separateness
advocated by the Shaker theology. It was also a portal to the greater world. Outsiders were
allowed nowhere else in the village without permission. If they came to visit their relatives, they
met them here; surplus products and produced goods were sold and traded from this building.
True to Western hospitality, these buildings also provided guest quarters and sometimes a tavern.

Expressions of Community

One of the most unusual features of a Shaker village is the total absence of private homes. In
fact, privacy was not part of Shaker life. The members were divided into groups called

Figure 4. Trustees Office.
“families”. Families were arranged in a relative hierarchy according to length of membership and maturity in the faith; the Center family was the most senior and it was this one to which the ministry belonged. At Pleasant Hill, new converts were assigned to the Gathering Order while they learned more about the Shaker beliefs and way of life. Two or more members of the ministry, called elders and eldresses, guided each family and were responsible for all parts of the lives of those in their charge.

Father Joseph established family life in the late 1700s and by the mid-1800s it had evolved into a systematic way of life. The 1845 Millennial Laws contain extensive instructions regarding the organization of families and the behavior of the members. The family concept broke apart the normal social order and remade it Shaker-style. Natural families were separated and then recombined with the members of other natural families in ways that promoted attention to God and Shaker values; children were separated from parents and sent to live in the Children’s House while husbands and wives were assigned to different families. The members of separate families were not to have extended contact with each other. This breaking of natural bonds, especially the bond between parent and child, removed distractions from the individual’s quest for perfection.

No member may go out of the family wherein they live, to any other family, on an errand, or on a visit, without liberty of the Elders.

Visiting between parents and children or with relatives from other families, or from among the world, should be done at the Office as a general rule; and wherein it is proper to deviate from this rule, the Elders must direct according to circumstances (Meacham and Wright 1845).

Sister Frances told the story of her arrival in the Shaker village. Frances was ten years old when she and her younger sister, Ruth, were sent to live with the Shakers. On their first morning, Sister Mary, who was in charge of some the children, began to help Ruth find a dress to wear that day. Frances tried to intervene, telling Sister Mary that she, Frances, would assist her sister. Sister Mary replied, “… your little sister needs a mother, and I will be that mother” (Carr 1995).

The families were named according to their geographic position relative to the meetinghouse. At Pleasant Hill, the enduring families were the Center Family, where the meetinghouse was located, and the East, West, North Lot, West Lot and Tanyard families. Eight other families also were established but were disbanded after a very short period of time (Thomas and Thomas 1973). The Center, East and West families comprised the main portion of the village, while the others were outliers. Each family had its own dwelling house Both men and women lived together in the house with nothing more than a hallway to separate the sleeping quarters. “It was a very bold experiment to have men and women living in the same house who were not related and not part of a private family but rather [as] a communal family. There was no physical barrier [between the men and women]” (Hadd 2004). Hadd called it a “Christ family,” consisting of a father and mother (the elders and eldresses) and the children (the other adult members of the family); “they have to be there together” (2004). The Millennial Laws dictated the rules for the ordering of time and space within the dwelling house in order to minimize contact between the genders and to remove any temptation that might exist (Hadd 2004). The 1845 version of the Laws was particularly explicit about the organization of society and the interaction that Brethren and Sisters might have, or more likely, may not have:
The gospel of Christ’s Second Appearing, strictly forbids all private union between the two sexes, in any case, place, or under any circumstances, indoors or out (Meacham and Wright 1845).

More specifically, the Laws dictated that brothers and sisters might not lend things to each other, give private gifts to each other, go to each other’s shops, or even pass each other on the stairs (Meacham and Wright 1845). Time was strictly controlled in order to establish private space for the brothers and sisters:

All are required to rise in the morning at the signal given for that purpose; and when any rise before the usual time they must not be noisy.

2. Brethren should leave their rooms, within fifteen minutes after the signal time of rising in the morning, unless prevented by sickness or infirmity.

3. Sisters must not go to brethren’s rooms, to do chores, until twenty minutes after the signal time of rising in the morning. (Meacham and Wright 1845)

Each family had its own dwelling house and its own shops, barns and other structures to support it. “There isn’t necessarily any set plan [for the layout of each family]; there has to be a large home where the members can live and everything else is pretty much up in the air” (Hadd 2004). The structures for a particular family are grouped into one location, and each family’s space was laid out according to the needs and desires of the individual family. At Sabbathday Lake, the layout of each family section was designed so that the animals were kept in a specific location:

Here [Sabbathday Lake] what they did is they tried to keep the animals back, so we did things in parallel rows so the first row was living quarters, second row was shops, third row was barns, with the pastures behind. That helped to keep some of the animal stench away from the families and kept things more orderly. North Family created a courtyard, with the dwelling house way back from the road and shops on the side and they had the animals across the street trying to do the same thing, but doing it in a different pattern (Hadd 2004).

The dwelling houses, especially, mark a village as Shaker in part because of their typically large size and multiple floors and the common architectural features (Figure 6).
Nicoletta points out that the dwelling house was the center of Shaker communal life and therefore it was “also the most important in shaping the behavior of sect members” (Nicoletta 2003). It was in the dwelling house that meals were taken, private worship took place, and religious classes were held in addition to the ordinary chores of daily life. The kitchens were frequently the location where fancy taste treats were baked, fruits were preserved, and vegetables were canned for sale.

**Expressions of Celibacy and Gender Equality**

The Shakers’ practice of celibacy dates to their first leader, Mother Jane Wardley. Mother Ann Lee, the second leader and the one to whom the sect looks as their true founder, made celibacy a requirement. This followed a vision in which she understood that celibacy was the key to sinless perfection and salvation (Garrett 1987).

Along with the revelation about celibacy, Mother Ann is also said to have had a revelation concerning the nature of God. In that revelation, she understood that God was of two natures and that these natures corresponded to the masculine and the feminine, “each distinct in function yet one in being, Co-equals in Deity” (White and Taylor 1905).

The architectural designs and building use at Pleasant Hill reflect and reinforce these beliefs. Apart from the agricultural buildings, most of the buildings in the village were used by only one gender at a time. Each family was required to support itself; to do so each family had workshops in which the tasks of the families were carried out. There was a Sisters’ Shop and a Brethren’s shop in each family. The use that the family made of these buildings varied but was typical of the times. The sisters did sewing and weaving, providing clothing and other goods needed in the village while the brothers worked in carpentry, cobbling, broom making or other typically male tasks.

Two kinds of village buildings were common-use buildings, used by both genders concurrently – the meetinghouse and the dwelling house. Because both men and women used these buildings, the architecture was designed so that the separation of the genders was facilitated while at the same time ensuring that the facilities provided to men and women were
equal. These buildings exhibit the only real architectural curiosities in the village, the dual front doors.

The dwelling house was the largest building in a Shaker village. In most villages, there was more than one such house, one for each family. At Pleasant Hill, the current Center Family Dwelling is the fourth such building, the others having been outgrown or destroyed (Figure 5, earlier).

Entry to the building was governed by one’s gender; Shaker brothers used the left door and the sisters used the right door (Figure 6). Inside, the pattern continued; men used the left staircases and women used the right ones. The dormitory rooms on the upper floors were assigned so that men lived on the left side of the hall and women were given rooms on the right side.

![Figure 6. Dwelling House. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.](image)

The only crossovers allowed were those that occurred at specific times of day when the assigned sisters went to the men’s side to clean the rooms. The dining room of the family dwellings also reflected their theology. The room was set up so that women dined on one side of the room and men on the other side (Figure 7).
The dual front doors of the meetinghouse (Figure 8) governed entry to that building as well.

Inside, the benches (Figure 9) were arranged so that women worshipped on one side of the room and men on the opposite side.
Expressions of Millennialism

Shaker millennialism is inherent in the overall appearance of the village, especially in the quality of the structures and in the way they were maintained. Shaker millennialism is based on the belief that the Kingdom of God has already come and that the Millennium began in 1747 when their sect was established (Hadd 2004). Millennialism is reflected in the Shaker villages by the amount and quality of the work that went into creating the built environment. In the northeastern United States the villages were not built from scratch, as Pleasant Hill was. Many of the buildings in these villages were preexisting and frequently were owned by a member of the congregation. That member donated his farm or his house to the new Society for their communal use. These buildings or farms were then adapted to Shaker use; in other words, the Shakers were “taking profane things for sacred use” (Hadd 2004). At Pleasant Hill, the Shakers built the village from the ground up. Both the adaptations and the new structures were built in such a way that the resulting workmanship went far beyond normal pride in one’s work.

... when a Shaker is put upon the soil, to beautify it by his tilth, the difference between his husbandry and that of a Gentile farmer, who is thinking solely of his profits, is likely to be great. While the Gentile is watching for his returns, the Shaker is intent upon his service (Dixon 1867).

The difference that Dixon observed between a Shaker farmer and what he calls a “Gentile” farmer is the reason behind the effort. While the worldly farmer of the rural nineteenth century West was concerned with feeding his family and putting aside extra money, the Shaker’s only concern was bringing about heaven on earth. He understood that the Kingdom of Heaven, when
it was fully established on earth, would be “like a Shaker village, only better. It is built with better materials and it is built more perfectly, and it is built more grandly” (Hadd 2004). The village was essentially a copy of the spiritual archetype, the New Jerusalem that the Scriptures described. Since they believed that they were already living the Kingdom life, the work they did to produce a Kingdom village had to be of a quality above and beyond anything that would be produced by the world. Mother Ann’s constant refrain was to “put your hands to work and your hearts to God” (Testimonies 1888). She added, “… do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live and as you would if you knew you must die tomorrow (Testimonies 1888), meaning that work in the village should be accomplished as neatly and carefully as it would be if the workman had an infinite amount of time to perfect the job and at the same do the work as if he or she would be required to face God on the next day and account for the quality of the work.

The excess of quality in the construction is evident throughout Pleasant Hill. The building in Figure 10 was built in 1809.

![Figure 10. Example of Shaker stonework.](image)

It is a good example of Shaker stonework, which has been called the finest in Kentucky (Lancaster 2001) in part because of their work ethic. The raised mortar used in this building and others in the village is a design characteristic used by Burnett. The additional work to create the raised effect represents some of the extra effort made by the Shakers to create interest and beauty without introducing extraneous, non-functional elements. In addition to adding texture to the facade of the building, the raised mortar helps the stone to shed water (Nicoletta 1995).

Quality was a concern even in the laying out of the fields. The Millennial Laws describe the best way to design the farm: “It is considered good order to layout and fence all kinds of lots, fields and gardens in a square form where it is practical, but the proportions, as to length and width may be left to the discretion of those who direct the work” (Hadd 1996), meaning that if a square field is the one that creates the greatest order and is the most practical, it is even more
orderly and more practical for the person actually doing the work to define the best shape for the field. Other design features that point to Shaker millennial beliefs include the sidewalks (Figure 11) in the village.

Figure 11. Village sidewalks.

When Charles Nordhoff visited Pleasant Hill in the years preceding 1875, he commented that the sidewalks were “laid with flagging-stones – but so narrow that two persons cannot walk abreast” (1875). Kirk points out that the pathways between buildings were intentionally narrow and that the long line of the sidewalks “echoed the faith that Believers were on a linear progression that would continue until the end of the world” (Kirk 1997). He is referring to their belief that God is moving the world toward the end that He has planned for it. In their doctrine, as in mainstream Christian thought, one day follows the next without repetition, from the creation of the world.

**Expressions of Charism**

The Shakers were marked especially by their charismatic behavior. From the first, their leaders experienced multiple visions in which God spoke to them or in which long-dead Shaker leaders came to guide and inform them. The Shakers understood these visions as part of the spiritual gifts given to them by God. Mother Ann elevated the acknowledgement of gifts to a high level, especially during their worship. She brought “a new level of spiritual experience through the night-long ceremonies of ecstatic worship …” (Garrett 1987). At a very early point, their worship was peculiar enough to be noticed and described in a newspaper article in Virginia.
They ... converse in their own way about the scriptures ... until the moving of the spirit comes upon them, which is first perceived by their beginning leisurely to scratch upon their thighs or other parts of their bodies; from that the motion becomes gradually quicker, and proceeds to trembling, shaking, and screeching in the most dreadful manner; at the same time their features are not distinguishable by reason of the quick motion of their heads, which strange agitation at last ends in singing and dancing ... (Correspondent 1769).

Their worship style included “singing, dancing, shaking, shouting, leaping, speaking in an unknown tongue, and prophesying” (Haskett 1828). Dance was one of the marks of Shakers that set them apart from other religious groups. As an expression of their worship, their dance was usually energetic and often frenetic. In one of the first examples of illustrated journalism, Benson John Lossing wrote and illustrated an early article about the Shakers in which he described the worship service as he witnessed it.

The worshipers soon arose, and approached from opposite ends of the room, until the two front rows were within two yards of each other, the women modestly casting their eyes to the floor. The benches were then instantly removed. There they stood in silence, in serried columns like platoons in military, while two rows of men and women stood along the wall, facing the audience. From these came a grave personage, and standing in the centre of the worshipers, addressed them with a few words of exhortation. All stood in silence for a few minutes at the conclusion of his remarks, when they began to sign a hymn of several verses to a lively tune, and keeping time with their feet. ... After two other brethren had given brief “testimonies,” the worshipers all turned their backs to the audience, except those of the two wall rows, and commenced a backward and forward march, or dance, in a regular springing step, keeping time to the music of their voices, while their hands hung closely to their sides. The wall rows alone kept time with their hands moving up and down, the palms turned upward. The singing appeared like a simple refrain and a chorus of too-ral-loo, too-ral-loo, while all the movements with hand, foot, and limb were extremely graceful” (Lossing 1857).

Mother Ann was apparently highly charismatic, with a “degree of discernment and penetration which nothing short of Divine Power and Wisdom could inspire” (Testimonies 1888). Even though the worship was highly physical, Mother Ann did not behave unseemly. “She did not act like the possessed prophets earlier in the century. She did not preach, nor did she deliver God’s warnings in her own voice. She described her visions, she sang and gestured with a beauty and power that compelled belief, and, most importantly, she showed considerable psychological astuteness in maintaining her position of spiritual leadership” (Garrett 1987). Even though more than three decades passed between the death of Mother Ann and the building of Pleasant Hill, her teachings were embedded in the construction of the village.

Perhaps the most significant element of the village layout that points to the charism of the members is the Holy Sinai Plain. The plain was a holy and sacred place that was discovered and used during the time known variously as Mother’s Work and the Era of Manifestations. This time period was known for the Shakers’ return to highly impassioned visionary behavior, including apparent visitations from Mother Ann and other deceased leaders along with a variety of historical figures. While this era, which ran from the 1830s to the 1850s, was a return to the traditional spiritualistic worship, there were innovations that marked the time as new or stylistically changed. These included the gift drawings and gift songs that represented artistically a number of the visions. In addition to the individual visions, the entire village was caught up in
a celebration of the “feast of the Passover” as it was called at the central ministry in Mount Lebanon. As a part the increased visionary episodes, the central ministers required each village to locate, by spiritual means, an outdoor location for celebrating the feast. The feast ground would be used twice yearly for special celebrations and at which they would receive the visitations of important figures from world history and especially from the Shaker past.

Found “by the inspired” (Spiritual Journal 1860) on September 21, 1844, Holy Sinai Plain (Figure 13) is located about one-half mile from the village. It was a one-half acre oval shape that they sowed with bluegrass and enclosed with a plank fence with a gate. The gate contained a monument called the fountain stone. Off to the side of the plain was a signpost that read:

Ye passengers who thus draw near,
Read o’er these lines with solemn fear;
For like as Eden’s bowers, This Plain does sweetly hum,
With myriads of bright Angels Who bid you welcome, come.
(Spiritual Journal 1860).

The Holy Sinai Plain was used only eight times between its establishment in 1844 and its destruction in 1852. The first official use, on September 26, 1844, is recorded in the Spiritual Journal kept by the village. It is clear from the description that the Shakers were caught up in a vision of major proportions in which they visualized the entire village traveling to a sacred city, led by Father William, the brother of Mother Ann. Upon reaching the feast ground, they visualized themselves in a lovely bower, filled with food, drink, and biblical persons (Spiritual Journal 1860). After this interval they traveled to a city, probably the Heavenly Jerusalem, where they met King David, Mother Wisdom (not clearly identified) and deceased Shakers from Pleasant Hill. They then left the city and continued to the feast ground where they sang and marched and drank from the holy water in the fountain in the company of Mother Ann and the other deceased leaders of the society along with other Biblical personages like Jeremiah, Gideon, Lot, and Noah. At length, they began to march for home in the same manner as they had arrived.

After the use of the site was discontinued, the Shakers plowed over it and used it as farmland to hide it; the fountain stone presumably was destroyed. Archeologists rediscovered the site after an extensive search and it has been restored to what is pictured in Figure 12.
The geography of Pleasant Hill clearly reflects the Shakers’ theology. Pleasant Hill was designed intentionally to meet the standards set by their beliefs. This does two things: it declares to the world their beliefs and it reinforces those beliefs to the individual resident on a daily basis. The principles of cultural landscape analysis as defined by Schein and Mitchell were instructive in that they provided a framework for viewing theological space.

At Pleasant Hill the leaders had more control in molding the residents than in most normal environments. The physical landscape was particularly important to their theology and the appearance of the buildings and the layout of the village were proscribed so that specific aspects of the theology were reinforced. The leaders of the village – the members of the official ministry – had control over all aspects of village development and growth. Families were born, died, and rearranged at the discretion of the Ministry. Utility was an overriding concept. Village elements were focused upon the ideas that the leaders wished to reinforce. Since celibacy was the key to perfection, for example, the leaders made separation between the genders a commonplace practice. Because they believed that men and women were equal, they provided equal access to all parts of the village environment.

The construction of Pleasant Hill was based upon the Shakers’ central focus of creating heaven on earth. Because the village was a controlled environment, the produced space was also controlled so that it generated an aura of heaven on earth even though the Kingdom itself was not fully realized. The aura is visible through visualization of the Shakers at work and at worship. At work, they created a fully functional self-sufficient society that required little or no interaction with the world at large. At worship, they expressed their faith and their visions in song, dance, and spoken word. They received visions of the world to come and visitors from that world.

Figure 12. Holy Sinai Plain.
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Local Geography and Church Attendance: Wayne County, West Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Studies of church participation and attendance often leave geographic variables out altogether, either by using national surveys that do not distinguish between places or by using the coarse, state- or regional-level of geographic identification. Using primary data in a county case study, this study explores local church geography and geographic factors exerting an influence on church attendance and church switching. The author’s church census and surveys of residents challenge and augment previous studies of: 1) regional variation in religious culture; 2) the effects of church and denominational distribution, local culture, church switching, and distance on church attendance; 3) the accuracy of privately-funded, published church censuses.

INTRODUCTION

Forms of religion and their expression often distinguish one country and region from another. The culture of the United States is suffused with Christianity, having many Bible-derived laws (e.g., those forbidding homosexual marriage), religious phrases incorporated into its basic institutions (e.g., “In God We Trust” and “One Nation, Under God”), and many Christian standards of morality (viz., restrictions on alcohol purchase on Sunday mornings). The Christian religion as practiced in the US is characterized by emphasis on social activities, especially regular attendance at worship and other church services. While strength of devotion in US Christianity may be measured by bible study, prayer, viewing religious programming, and other public and private religious activities, church attendance often serves as the most useful and practical gauge of religious commitment (Welch and Baltzell 1984). Indeed, church attendance is correlated to other forms of religious expression in the US, making attendance a surrogate for other measures of religious commitment.

This paper examines local geographic factors that influence church attendance. Most studies of church attendance are conducted at the national or regional scale and reference denominational and demographic factors in order to explain observed attendance rates. By approaching attendance at the local level, this study shows that these factors cannot stand apart from the effects of local religious culture, local church distribution and accessibility, and urbanization. Using a county case study and primary data, this research challenges and augments previous studies of: 1) regional variation in religious culture; 2) the effects of church and denominational distribution, local culture, church switching, and distance on church attendance; 3) the accuracy of privately-funded, published church censuses.
STUDIES OF ATTENDANCE

Studies of church involvement, participation, and attendance have found predictive or explanatory power in denominational conditions. For example, denominational strictness is positively associated with attendance and participation, because members feel obligated via social pressures to participate regularly (Finke and Stark 1992; Smith et al. 2002; Iannaccone 1994). Perl and Olson (2000) posited that denominations that are in the minority in a local area often attract more devoted members by being more competitive (see also Wedam 2003). Cameron (1999) showed that the training of children and adolescents to be loyal to a denomination is associated with subsequent participation and denominational loyalty (see also Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Hout and Fischer 2002).

These studies fail to note that church accessibility and local religious culture also play a role in attendance and participation. Minority denominations, however strict, are less visible and perhaps less convenient or even inaccessible for members. Sands and Smock (1994) found that most trips to church were short commutes and cited a 1956 survey where residents generally reported that they attended the church closest to home. Furthermore, denominational strictness, religious training of children, and local denominational composition vary spatially. Regions whose churches cultivate religious devotion during childhood or where conservative or strict denominations predominate are expected to have higher rates of attendance.

Demographic or personal circumstances influence religious participation as well. Demographic circumstances associated with more frequent church visits are female gender (Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Levin, Taylor, and Chatters 1995; Smith et al. 2002) and higher income (Taylor and Chatters 1991). Older Americans assemble more often than younger ones, but there is evidence that elements associated with life cycle changes such as the presence of school age children in a family may prompt church attendance (Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Argue, Johnson, and White 1999; Smith et al. 2002). Church attendance is known to be highly correlated with personal strength of commitment, often expressed as “I am a strong Christian” or “Religious beliefs are very important to me” (Cameron 1999; Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999). Other personal factors that are associated with attendance include training as a child and involvement as an adolescent (Dudley 1993; Stolzenburg, Blair-Loy, and Waite 1995), regularity of prayer, tendency to switch denominations (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1995; Hadaway and Marler 1993; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Warner 1993), health status (Hays et al. 1998), associated political loyalties (Djupe 2000; Hout and Fischer 2002), marital status (Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Chatters and Taylor 1994; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990), parenthood (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite 1995), and even allocation of time and money resources, a person’s “religious capital” (Iannaccone 1990; Cameron 1999).

Those who switch denominations often participate more than those who do not (Warner 1993). Reasons normally proffered include stronger commitment among switchers (the active decision to switch is *ipso facto* a statement about commitment), switching to more conservative denominations (whose members generally exert social pressure on other members), or lack of strong denominational roots to begin with (decreasing the social costs of switching). Given that switchers appear to be more dedicated, perhaps it is because they choose a convenient church to facilitate frequent attendance or perhaps they attend more regularly despite the friction of distance. Neither the relationship of local geographic factors to switching and switchers’
Geographic variables such as local religious culture, drive time to church, accessibility to a person’s preferred denomination, urbanization, and church distribution are not typically considered along with the demographic and individualistic variables that predominate in the literature. Indeed, studies of church attendance often leave geography out altogether, by using national surveys that either fail to distinguish between people of different places or by using the coarse, state- or regional-level of geographic identification. This paper explicitly considers the effect of local religious culture and local geographic factors on participation.

GEOGRAPHY AND CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Most studies that confront the geography of US religion focus on denominational membership or attendance variation at the national or regional scale. National and regional studies of denominational affiliation go back at least to seminal articles by Zelinsky in the 1960s. Heatwole has written regional geographies of a single denomination (1986), the unchurched in the Southeast (1985), and the delineation of the vernacular Bible Belt region (1978). Church membership growth and denominational switching have been shown to be related to geographic factors such as regional population migration and growth and denominational regional orientation (Stump 1998). Thus, Southern Baptists grew dramatically in membership numbers in the period from 1980-1990, being the largest Southern denomination and beneficiary of strong Southern population growth. The Episcopal Church, strongest in the Northeast, suffered the opposite fate.

At the state level, Webster (2000) likewise noted that denominational affiliation and growth in Georgia in the 1980s were affected by the dynamics of population growth. Southern Baptists and Methodists were historically strongest in rural counties of Georgia which experienced little population growth and thus comprised a large, but declining share of Georgia’s denominational affiliation. At the same time, Roman Catholics and Mormons increased their market share, primarily in Georgia’s rapidly growing urban counties. In these studies of denominational growth, regional or county denominational composition and subsequent uneven population growth were determining factors in growth of membership.

Cultural norms influence church participation and vary by region. For example, Ellison and Sherkat (1995) recognized the “semi-involuntary” nature of religious affiliation of Black Southerners, who are expected to attend regularly to conform to social custom. For Black Southerners, “decisions... about participation in congregational activities have been shaped to a considerable degree by social norms and expectations” (Ellison and Sherkat 1995, 1416). Although individuals may not perceive spiritual benefits of church attendance, social pressure in this region discourages church quitting. Implicit in their thesis is the regional variation in cultural expectations and corresponding rates of church membership and attendance.

Stump (1986) investigated the reasons for this regional variation and found that “the motives underlying church attendance vary among the regional cohorts” (220). He concluded that “cultural settings of religious socialization” produce these varying motives (see also Stump 1987), meaning that regional variations in religious culture have a strong influence on observed rates of attendance. He found, for example, that the East South Central Census region had high reported attendance rates due to the conservative moral Protestant traditions (e.g., views on abortion). Based on these and similar findings, studies of church attendance at a national level
sometimes toss in a South/non-South dummy variable for quantitative analysis. While a tacit recognition of the role that regional religious context plays in church attendance is apparent in some studies at the regional or state level of analysis, this paper directly addresses local context as a factor in explaining local religious participation.

The effect of urbanization on religious participation has been scrutinized. Finke and Starke (1992) attempted to debunk the myth of the pious rural resident, citing higher membership rates for urban dwellers. Studies of actual church attendance, however, have generally upheld the stereotype, with rural residents attending church services more frequently (Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Levin, Taylor, and Chatters 1995). Stump (1998) found that membership in five of eight representative denominations grew at a more rapid rate in rural counties than urban counties during the period from 1980-1990. Ellison and Sherkat (1995) explained that the urban environment “offers more secular opportunities” to interact socially, find entertainment or recreation, and make business contacts, resulting in lower church participation rates for urban residents. In the degree of urbanization, we find a local geographic variable of putative importance in attendance studies, but find little investigation of its effect at the local level.

It can be expected that local geographic factors play a role in an individual’s church involvement, particularly attendance. Distance decay, for example, works to discourage even the most religious from attending regularly or often as distance from the preferred church increases. Cameron (1999) touched on this aspect of attendance when he noted that travel time can be equated to a cost of attendance which must be weighed against other time and money costs. Even strict denominations which stress regular attendance must combat the tyranny of distance, what he called “the brute fact of worship site location” (Cameron 1999, 442). Conversely, those who live close to church may find it more convenient to be committed or perhaps those who are devoted may choose a close church to facilitate their attendance. Sands and Smock (1994) detected distance decay in travel times to church in metropolitan Detroit, where the least frequent attendees (only a few times per year) were associated with longer travel times.

One pastor reported in a phone interview with the author that his most devoted members drove a long distance to church, traveling as much as two hours one-way each week to attend church services. Despite such anecdotal evidence that church-goers “ignore” distance, the frequency of attendance for the vast majority of members is likely to decrease as distance from their church increases. How convenient is church for regular attendees? At what point in church commute times is there a sharp drop in attendance? One study of the journey to church suggests that short commute times are the norm (Sands and Smock 1994). Berry and Garrison (1958) found in their central place research that churches were typically closely spaced (one for every 265 people), thus making church attendance a “low-order” good, because people did not appear willing to travel far to “consume” it. In a case study of churches in Appalachia, Leppman (2003) found similar numbers of people per church in three Kentucky counties, suggesting that Americans have created a church landscape of convenience. This study builds on these findings.

In their study of people who switched out of the Presbyterian denomination, Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens (1995) found that those moving to a new town and shopping for a new church made up 17% of all switchers, citing the absence of a church of the switcher’s original denomination as one reason for the change. Moving over a long distance and the subsequent failure to find a local church of one’s preferred denomination seems to be an obvious, if often overlooked, geographic reason for switching. Local moves, however, do not necessitate a change of church or denomination, because attachment to one’s home church may encourage longer commutes. In this research, residents and switchers were asked about travel time to
church and their reasons for church choice in an attempt to understand the effect that switching has on church choice and frequency of attendance.

**DATA FOR LOCAL STUDIES**

Studies of church affiliation and participation at the local level are hampered by data availability and limitations. Newman and Halvorson (1999) devote most of their chapter on “Counting the Faithful” to a discussion of data limitations. Among the most serious limitations over time are the sporadic nature of censuses of religion and questions about their comprehensiveness. The US Census Bureau collected county-level religion data in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but ceased in the 1930s due to concerns about the separation of church and state. The void has only been partially filled by privately-funded censuses of religion. Newman and Halvorson (1999) called the 1990 private church census (Bradley et al. 1992) “remarkably inclusive” (48), because the church groups who participated claimed about one half of the US population. A similar 2000 census (Jones et al., 2002) accounted for approximately the same percentage of the US population. These privately-funded, voluntary censuses form the basis for many spatial studies of US religion. An assessment of their accuracy and reliability, therefore, is critically important to properly understand the religious landscape. This study provides a starting point for such assessment by evaluating the published data in light of a detailed GPS census of churches in one county. The findings of this study indicate that the published data are unable to correctly characterize this county and perhaps others as well.

There is a lack of geographic studies of church involvement at scales finer that the county-level, perhaps because no published data is readily available for analysis. The latest census of religion (Jones et al, 2002) purposefully aggregates religious affiliation at the county level. Religious groups were “asked to compile data by county for all their congregations” (xvii). This level of aggregation necessitates the nearly universal use of regional boundaries based on county data or choropleth maps of US counties when mapping religious affiliation. Recent religious atlases use choropleth mapping of US counties (Newman and Halvorson 1999; Gaustad and Barlow 2001) or state-level aggregation of county data (Carroll 2000) as their method of presentation. Only use of primary data permits finer scale analysis.

Although some studies exist that examine the spatial variation in denominational growth and affiliation at the regional or state level, studies of attendance rates rarely acknowledge this variation, because national surveys of attendance either do not contain spatial data or this data is not considered important. The present research uses a GPS church census and resident surveys of a single county for analysis. Use of primary data permits an evaluation of the county’s religious culture, its place in the US religious landscape, and religious participation rates in light of local religious culture and geographic variables.

**LOCAL RELIGIOUS CULTURE**

Wayne County, West Virginia (Figure 1), is an Appalachian county (2004 population estimate: 42,515 and declining slightly) in the tri-state metropolitan region of Huntington, WV—Ashland, KY—Ironton, OH and is part of the South US Census region. Regional studies of church attendance (see Smith et al. 2002; Stump 1986) have identified the religiously conservative South, the so-called Bible Belt, which is dominated by evangelical Protestantism, particularly the Baptist denomination, as the region with the most dedicated participants.
Because regional trends in religious culture probably do not match US Census Bureau’s regions, it is debatable whether West Virginia or Wayne County reside in the nation’s conservative Bible Belt or in a more moderate, even liberal, religious region.

A glance at published membership rates (Jones et al. 2002) reveals that West Virginia’s church membership rate (35.9% reported as adherents) is among the lowest in the country and more similar to Washington (33.0%) or Oregon (31.3%) than to nearby Bible Belt states such as Kentucky (53.4%) or Tennessee (51.1%). Wayne County is reported to have 77 religious meeting places, which claim 11,366 adherents, making its rate of adherence even lower than the West Virginia state average with only 26.5% of the population claimed by any reporting religious body. The average reported weekly attendance is significantly less at just 3,830 or 9% of the total population. These numbers appear to place Wayne County and West Virginia outside the Bible Belt of Southern religious conservatism and high participation rates.

Geographers differ in their interpretation of such published data and the place of West Virginia in the US religious landscape. Zelinsky (1961), using a 1952 census of US religion (National Council of Churches of Christ 1952), placed the part of West Virginia that includes Wayne County into the Southern religious region of the US. Zelinsky’s Southern Region was dominated by Baptists with significant Methodist minorities. For Sopher (1967), who also used the 1952 data and was aware of Zelinsky’s work, all of West Virginia lay in the diverse, Methodist-dominated belt stretching from Pennsylvania to Kansas across the central US, but not in the South. Shortridge (1977), using a 1974 church census (Johnson et al. 1974), classified all West Virginia counties as “diverse, liberal Protestant,” characterized by low religious intensity and outside the region of “intense, conservative Protestant.” Heatwole’s (1978) Bible Belt map, based on percentage of the population claimed by the most conservative denominations (e.g., Southern Baptist Convention) listed in the 1974 church census, likewise excluded West Virginia. Gaustad and Barlow (2001) summarized well the various attempts to define the Bible Belt as “roughly from eastern Texas to the Carolinas (perhaps excluding Florida)” (353), apparently excluding West Virginia by noting that church affiliation rates are low in Appalachia. Most studies, therefore, seem to place all or part of West Virginia just outside the Southern Bible-Belt region. Its position on the border between two religious regions makes Wayne County an ideal case to evaluate the validity of regional characterizations based on published church enumerations.

The most recent published data (Table 1; Jones et al., 2002) for Wayne County, WV, with low overall membership rates, slightly less than 50% Baptist affiliation, and significant Methodist and Church of Christ minorities, hardly resolves this conflicting regionalization of religious culture because of potential errors in the data. While Jones et al. (2002) acknowledge the underreporting of their census statistics (solicited from known, organized religious bodies), Shortridge (1976) believed that in the case of Appalachia, in contrast to the rest of the nation, these privately-funded censuses of church membership could be sources of “large statistical error” because of the propensity of Appalachia to foster autonomous churches, so-called mountain churches (see McCauley 1995), not associated with the larger, reporting bodies. Because many earlier studies of membership and attendance rely on these secondary sources, significant errors, if present, would certainly suggest that the current understanding of the nation’s religious landscape is inadequate. In her study of Union, an Appalachian county in Georgia, Andrews (1990) found that the published census (Quinn et al. 1980) underestimated churches by over 40%.
Table 1 – Wayne County, WV places of worship; source: author’s GPS census and Jones et al. (2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Published Counts</th>
<th>Author’s Counts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>36 (47%)</td>
<td>86 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-denominational or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>19 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>14 (18%)</td>
<td>13 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>12 (16%)</td>
<td>12 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God</td>
<td>9 (12%)</td>
<td>10 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>154 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant errors are present in the published data for Wayne County, WV. The author’s GPS census (Table 1) enumerated 154 Christian meeting places in the county, more than twice the published tally (Jones et al. 2002), confirming Shortridge’s (1976) hypothesis that many unreported churches exist in Appalachian counties. Of the 154 congregations in Wayne County, 152 are Protestant (99%), 86 or 55% are Baptist, with a single Roman Catholic church and one Eastern Orthodox. The presence of a large number of small, unaffiliated churches is not entirely unforeseen. Appalachia is noted for the proliferation of mountain churches. McCauley (1995) described the mountain religion of Appalachia as characterized by membership democracy (the priesthood of all believers in contrast to a hierarchical system of priests, bishops, etc.) and congregational autonomy, a “free church polity” where “the independent nondenominational church tradition… stands at the epicenter” (45).

Partial agreement between author’s census and published data (Table 1) is overshadowed by the large numbers of unaffiliated Baptist churches and many non-denominational/community churches that escaped recognition in the published data (Jones et al. 2002). The largest discrepancy was found in the number of Baptist churches in the county. Protestant and particularly Baptist dominance are often important defining criteria for the regional divisions of religion, especially the Southern conservative region (Smith, et al. 2002; Carroll 2000; Heatwole 1978; Zelinsky 1961). Pentecostal churches, the group most closely associated with the Bible Belt by Gaustad and Barlow (2001), formed a slightly larger percentage of the total churches in the author census than in Jones et al. (2002). Also significant, the strength of the Methodist minority (a moderate or liberal Protestant denomination) decreased from 18% of churches (as reported in Jones et al., 2002) to just 8% of the author’s counts. Two groups entirely unaccounted for by published data were the nondenominational and unclassified churches, together totaling 12% of all churches in the county, the second largest component of the denominational matrix in the county. Some members and pastors of these churches indicated their Baptist or Pentecostal orientation in author interviews.

By extrapolating from pastors’ counts solicited by the author, the 154 Christian congregations were found to have accounted for approximately 12,500 weekly attendees (28% of the population), three times the rate reported in Jones et al. (2002), and 22,000 members (50% membership rate), almost twice the number and rate reported in Jones et al. (2002). Evidence from studies of attendance rates (Finke and Stark 1992; Marler and Hadaway 1999) suggests that pastors are a more reliable source of attendance information than self-reports from member surveys, so any inflation of attendance and member numbers is likely slight. A membership rate
of 50% for Wayne County is higher than adherence rates published for Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina, but lower than Mississippi, Texas, and Alabama.

There exists one congregation for every 277 people in the county, a rate similar to those recorded by Berry and Garrison (1958) in Iowa and Leppman (2005) in Kentucky. The broad distribution of churches across the county—density is just under 1 church for every 2 square miles (154 churches; 506 square miles) and only remote areas in the southeast and public recreation areas lack churches—indicates that a considerable selection of churches is available even for rural residents (Figure 1). In fact, Wayne County church distribution appears to favor rural residents, who comprise 61.4% of the population. Of the 154 county churches, 124 (80.5%) fall outside the Urbanized Areas—the towns of Ceredo and Kenova and the western part of the city of Huntington—defined by the US Census Bureau. Most denominations in the county exhibited neither a strong urban nor rural bias. Baptist, Methodist, Churches of God, Churches of Christ, and community churches were broadly distributed across the county (Figure 1). The three Presbyterian churches were represented both in the urban north of the county and the remote rural south. The single Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches were centrally located in the county. The two Christian churches were both urban, while all six Pentecostal churches were located in rural areas.

RESIDENT SURVEYS

A combination of two author surveys was used to evaluate the effect of denominational, demographic/personal, switching history, and geographic variables on individuals’ church choice and attendance. Residents were asked about their church preference and attendance habits. Questions included frequency of attendance and the typical denominational and demographic questions, but also asked about strength of devotion (e.g., Bible reading habits) and reasons for church choice. Open-ended questions for church choice and circumstances surrounding switching provided the most insight into local religious culture and geographic variables affecting attendance.

The first survey provided a large sample of frequent church-goers for statistical and geocoding analysis. Forty-eight hundred church member surveys were delivered to church buildings for pastors/church leaders of all county churches in the autumn of 2003. The pastors were asked in a letter to hand out the surveys to members and visitors, who returned them using self-addressed, postage-paid, business-reply envelopes. At least one member or visitor from 67 of the congregations returned surveys, representing every Protestant group and the Roman Catholic church. The response rate to this survey was only about 10% (n = 464) and limited its usefulness.

Because the mail survey response rate was low and because they favored frequent attendees, who were most likely to be present when the surveys were distributed, a second survey of 100 county residents was conducted by telephone in the fall of 2004 (Table 2). This survey instrument clarified a few questions from the mail survey and provided a random sample of residents at all levels of church attendance frequency. Participation rates in Wayne County as measured by phone respondents’ self-reports are higher than published data has recorded, perhaps because most of the respondents (81.7%) reported religious affiliation/training as children (question 10), a factor associated with religious intensity as an adult (see Dudley 1993; Stolzenburg, Blair-Loy, and Waite 1995). Respondents reported childhood religious training as “I inherited the Methodist faith,” “I’ve been attending this church since I was born,” “It’s my
home church” or the like. Loyalty that developed as a child ranked second in the list of reasons for church choice (question 4); more than ten percent of those interviewed by phone had attended their church from their youth (question 3c).
Table 2 – Telephone survey results (N=100). Some respondents did not answer all questions. The total number of responses to each question appears in parentheses after each question. Percentages for each response are listed in bold before the number of cases in parentheses. Only the top six responses are listed for each question, thus some rows do not total 100%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your home address? (n=100)</td>
<td>In Wayne County</td>
<td>100.0 (96)</td>
<td>Not in Wayne County</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How often do you attend church? (n=100)</td>
<td>Never or rarely</td>
<td>19.0 (19)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/year</td>
<td>12.0 (12)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/month</td>
<td>14.0 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Which church do you attend most often? (n=94)</td>
<td>In Wayne County</td>
<td>75.5 (71)</td>
<td>Not in Wayne County</td>
<td>24.5 (23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. Are you a member of this church or just a visitor? (n=92)</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>63.0 (58)</td>
<td>Visitor</td>
<td>37.0 (34)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c. How long have you attended this church? (n=86)</td>
<td>From youth</td>
<td>10.5 (9)</td>
<td>Several years</td>
<td>75.6 (65)</td>
<td>About a year</td>
<td>4.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Why do you attend this church? (n=91)</td>
<td>Respondents could list more than one reason</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>19.8 (18)</td>
<td>Raised in/learned in church</td>
<td>17.6 (16)</td>
<td>Family influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. Do your spouse or children attend this church? (n=90)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71.1 (64)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>28.8 (26)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Do your friends or extended family attend this church? (n=90)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84.4 (76)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>15.5 (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How long does it take you to get to church? (n=91)</td>
<td>Mean = 15.4 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes or less</td>
<td>30.8 (28)</td>
<td>11-20 minutes</td>
<td>25.3 (23)</td>
<td>21-30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you read the Bible or other religious material? (n=93)</td>
<td>Less than once/month</td>
<td>18.3 (17)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/month</td>
<td>14.0 (13)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/week</td>
<td>36.6 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How often do you listen or watch religious programming on TV, the radio, or</td>
<td>Less than once/month <strong>19.4</strong> (18)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/month <strong>10.8</strong> (10)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/week <strong>40.9</strong> (38)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/day <strong>29.0</strong> (27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDs? (n=93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How often do you pray? (n=93)</td>
<td>Less than once/month <strong>4.3</strong> (4)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/month <strong>5.4</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/week <strong>6.5</strong> (6)</td>
<td>Once or a few times/day <strong>83.9</strong> (78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What was your religious affiliation at age 16? (n=93)</td>
<td>Baptist <strong>53.8</strong> (50)</td>
<td>None <strong>18.3</strong> (17)</td>
<td>United Methodist <strong>15.1</strong> (14)</td>
<td>Church of Christ <strong>4.3</strong> (4)</td>
<td>Church of God <strong>3.2</strong> (3)</td>
<td>Pentecostal <strong>3.2</strong> (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. What is your religious affiliation today? (n=93)</td>
<td>Baptist <strong>54.8</strong> (51)</td>
<td>United Methodist <strong>8.6</strong> (8)</td>
<td>Church of God <strong>7.5</strong> (7)</td>
<td>Non-denominational or None <strong>tied 6.5</strong> (6)</td>
<td>Church of Christ or Pentecostal <strong>tied 5.4</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Congregational <strong>2.2</strong> (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a. Have you ever switched churches within your denomination? (n=91)</td>
<td>Yes <strong>56.0</strong> (51)</td>
<td>No <strong>44.0</strong> (40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b. Have you ever switched denominations? (n=91)</td>
<td>Yes <strong>33.0</strong> (30)</td>
<td>No <strong>67.0</strong> (61)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Thinking about your most recent church switch, what were your reasons for</td>
<td>Respondents could list Moved <strong>33.3</strong> (15)</td>
<td>Family/marriage <strong>24.4</strong> (11)</td>
<td>Church doctrine/ denomination <strong>17.8</strong> (8)</td>
<td>Church problems <strong>11.1</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Friends attend <strong>8.9</strong> (4)</td>
<td>Close to home <strong>6.7</strong> (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>switching churches within your denomination? (n=45)</td>
<td>more than one reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Thinking about your most recent denominational switch, what were your reasons</td>
<td>Respondents could list Family/marriage <strong>40.7</strong> (11)</td>
<td>Close to home <strong>18.5</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Church doctrine/ denomination <strong>18.5</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Moved <strong>14.8</strong> (4)</td>
<td>Nature of worship <strong>11.1</strong> (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for switching denominations? (n=27)</td>
<td>more than one reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What is your highest educational achievement? (n=97)</td>
<td>Didn't finish HS <strong>13.4</strong> (13)</td>
<td>HS <strong>71.1</strong> (69)</td>
<td>Associate degree <strong>5.2</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree <strong>5.2</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Master's degree or higher <strong>5.2</strong> (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What is your age? (n=94)</td>
<td>Mean = 55 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What is your gender? (n=97)</td>
<td>Female <strong>72.2</strong> (70)</td>
<td>Male <strong>27.8</strong> (27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. What is your marital status? (n=97)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.4 (12)</td>
<td>63.9 (62)</td>
<td>12.4 (12)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.3 (11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How many children do you have living in your household? (n=97)</td>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.1 (67)</td>
<td>16.5 (16)</td>
<td>7.2 (7)</td>
<td>7.2 (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. What is your annual household income? (n=65)</td>
<td>$0-20,0000</td>
<td>$20,001-40,000</td>
<td>$40,000-60,000</td>
<td>$60,000+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.1 (15)</td>
<td>46.2 (30)</td>
<td>10.8 (7)</td>
<td>20.0 (13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A comparison of the random telephone survey of 100 county residents to the General Social Survey of the US population (GSS; Davis et al. 2002) reveals important place-specific characteristics of Wayne County, WV. Wayne County telephone survey respondents were much more frequent attenders (55% attend once or several times per week) than GSS respondents (31%), pray more frequently (83.9% pray once or a few times per day vs. 57.1% of GSS respondents), and are far more likely to be Protestant (93.5% vs. 53.2%) and Baptist (54.8% vs. 33.1%) than the average US respondent. Sixty-three percent of respondents claimed to be members of a church, a rate slightly higher than the estimate (50%) from pastor surveys. Wayne County is more similar to its Bible Belt neighbors to the south in terms of rates of adherence, strength of commitment, and Protestant (and Baptist) dominance than to the national average or to the Methodist-dominated region to the north.

Finke and Starke (1992) argued that more churches increased church competition and would result in greater adherence rates in the population as each group tailors its message to a particular segment of the population. Wayne County certainly has a broad variety of churches, yet mail survey respondents ranked denominational or distinctive doctrinal issues a distant sixth in order of importance for church choice. They frequently praised the teaching or conservative messages of the pastor with phrases such as “follows the Bible” or “they use the King James Bible,” but only occasional emphasized denomination—“My past denomination was too ‘corporate,’” or “It’s theologically moderate to liberal, like me.” Sometimes, respondents specifically disavowed denominational allegiance: “The church name isn’t important, but I attend because they teach and stand on the word of God.” Phone survey respondents in particular rarely mentioned denominational differences as reasons for church choice.

An overwhelming percentage of respondents attended with family members (Table 2, question 5) and named either training as a child and subsequent loyalty or family influence as two of the most important reasons for church choice (question 4). Often family and other reasons were mixed together in responses: “My father is the pastor,” “Spouse’s family tradition,” “My whole family was saved and baptized here,” “This is the church in which I was raised,” “It is close and I’ve gone there since childhood.” Personal reasons for attendance ranged from the spiritual (“God called me to worship there”) and aesthetic (“An ideal example of a little country church by the side of the road”) to the bluntly pragmatic (“I want to”).

Proximity to the church building was mentioned more than any other reason for church choice by those surveyed by phone (Table 2, question 4). Mail survey respondents ranked it fourth behind strong Bible teaching, friendly people, and childhood training. Typical statements for church choice where church location was named were “It is the closest Church of Christ to my home,” “I started attending this church when my daughters were small because it was so easy to get to from our home,” “We like the people and it is nearby,” “My family probably started attending this church originally because it is so near home,” or “Not only is it close to home, but it is a ‘home feeling’ church.” While “close to home” is subjective, quantitative analysis reveals that the median travel time to church for all respondents of both surveys is 10 minutes (Table 3, question 6; mean = 12.4 minutes; n = 555), and fully 40% of respondents travel five minutes or less to church. A travel time of ten minutes encompassed 61% of all respondents, 20 minutes accounted for 87%, while 30 minutes got 95%. These numbers are remarkably similar to Sands and Smock’s (1994) study on drive time to church in metropolitan Detroit. They found a median trip length of 10 minutes (mean = 13.2 minutes), with 36% traveling five minutes or less to church and 95% commuting under 30 minutes to worship.
Pentecostal and Roman Catholics reported the longest travel times of all the denominations and members of the Church of God, United Methodist Church, and nondenominational churches commute the shortest distances. There were, however, no statistically significant relationships between denomination or number of churches in the county and the distance traveled by attendees to worship (Table 3) except in the case of Pentecostal churches, whose members commuted the farthest to church. Sands and Smock (1994) noted, but offered no explanation for, the fact that Pentecostals in metropolitan Detroit were associated with longer travel times than other Protestant denominations. In the present study, long travel times for Pentecostals are a reflection of church distribution—all six are rural and four of them are far from state highways. Roman Catholics averaged the second highest travel time among denominations commuting to their single church in the county. Parish geography may create this tendency, because members are encouraged to commute to the parish church where they are registered rather than to other closer churches (Sands and Smock 1994). Members of the Church of Christ had the third longest average travel time, despite the presence of 12 churches broadly distributed throughout the county.

Table 3 – Travel time to church in minutes by subgroup (combined survey data, N=564); each mean was compared to the mean of all respondents to produce a value for \( t \). * \( p < .05 \); ** \( p < .01 \); two-tailed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Mean Travel Time</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Difference of Means ( t )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents (n=555)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denominational Affiliation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist (n=312)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist (n=80)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Christ (n=60)</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-denominational (n=13)</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God (n=37)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal (n=6)</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>2.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian (n=18)</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic (n=11)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban-Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geocoded urban (n=120)</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geocoded rural (n=254)</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I never switched” (n=253)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switched congregations (n=118)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switched denomination (n=98)</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switched both (n=14)</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never or rarely (n=19)</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or a few times per year (n=13)</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or a few times per month (n=27)</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>3.88**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly (n=175)</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times per week (n=329)</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>-1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than observing an inverse linear relationship between frequency of attendance and travel time, as might be expected, the most frequent attendees (“once per week” or “several times per week”) enjoyed the shortest travel times of all groups (Table 3), while even the least frequent attendees (“never or rarely” or “once or a few times per year”) averaged shorter travel times than intermittent attendees (“once or a few times per month”). For those attending the least, “never or rarely,” church attendance assumes the characteristics of a low order good in central place terms and both mail and phone survey respondents admitted that the most important reason for their
church choice was proximity. Ironically, the respondents who attend several times per week had the shortest average travel time to church (mean = 11.4 minutes), but did not mention proximity as one of the most important reasons for church preference. The respondents who attend only once or a few times per month had significantly longer travel times than the mean, but listed “close to home” as one of the primary reasons for their church choice. Those who attend intermittently traveled farther to attend a preferred church, but the distance apparently encourages regular absence.

Finke and Starke (1992) reasoned that within urban areas people have greater access to a variety of churches and are able to shop in the religious marketplace for a suitable church more effectively than country folks. They additionally supposed that urban residents showed greater adherence rates because of increased access to church and greater church choice. Urban residents of Wayne County, however, did not display more flexibility in church choice, favoring urban churches (choosing one as a home church 85.4% of the time). Rural residents (61.4% of the population), who might be supposed to be at a disadvantage in terms of church access, actually enjoyed a disproportionate share of the churches in the county (80.6% of the churches are rural) and also favored these rural churches (84.1% of them attended rural churches). Correspondingly, urbanites frequented rural churches only 10.7% of the time, while rural residents made urban churches their home churches 13.8% of the time, reflecting slightly greater availability and demonstrating slightly greater flexibility of church choice for rural residents.

There was no difference in the frequency of attendance between the urban and rural residents in Wayne County (both groups reported high frequency of attendance in both surveys), and urban residents reported travel times to worship similar to rural residents (Table 3). Mean drive time for urban and rural location relied on geocoding of respondents’ addresses; many addresses were not matched and most unmatched/unmatchable addresses were rural. So although both groups appeared to have commute times less than the overall mean, it is likely that rural residents had longer drive times than calculated from the geocoded addresses (Table 3) and longer drive times than urbanites.

After switching, switchers cited proximity as motivation for attendance more often than non-switchers, but actually drive farther on average to church than non-switchers (Table 3). Church and denominational switchers had a variety of reasons for church choice, the most important of which were family reasons, especially marriage to a spouse from a different congregation or denomination. “My husband wanted to attend with his sister,” “my brother-in-law” influenced us to attend, and “my husband is a member of [another denomination]” were typical responses involving family. However, survey respondents ranked moving high on the list of reasons for congregational (intra-denominational) switching (question 13), putting it ahead of marriage as a motivation. One woman who had changed congregations, but not denominations wrote that she “moved… and it was hard to keep going back and forth to [my church],” and thus she chose a closer church of the same denomination. Because church switching within a denomination carries far less social cost than denominational switching, this result was not unforeseen. Moving was less a factor when switching denominations. It ranked behind marriage, proximity and doctrinal/denominational reasons.

While not quite as important as marriage and family influence, proximity to church was cited as a significant factor for congregational switching (cited by 22.4% in the mail-in survey; 6.7% in the telephone survey) and denominational switching (8.8% and 18.5%). Both categories of switchers, particularly congregational switchers, are significantly correlated to frequency of
attendance and with travel time to church (see below), suggesting that switchers are more dedicated (i.e., they attend more frequently and travel farther to attend; cf. Warner 1993).

Correlation analysis of the survey data is possible by coding some of the variables as discrete, interval data or as binary variables. Responses to the frequency of attendance question (Table 2, question 2), for example, ranged from “never or rarely” (coded as zero) to “several times per week” (coded as four) and the education level question was also coded from zero to four. Frequency of prayer, bible reading, viewing or listening to religious programming, education, number of children living in the household, and income were coded from zero to three. Marital status, gender, congregational and denominational switching were coded as binary variables for analysis.
## Table 4 - Correlation matrix (combined survey data; \(n=564\)); * \(p < .05\); ** \(p < .01\); two-tailed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Frequency of Attendance</th>
<th>Travel Time</th>
<th>Bible Reading</th>
<th>TV/Radio Programming</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Switched Church</th>
<th>Switched Denom.</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
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Correlation analysis of the combined surveys (n = 564; Table 4) reveals a significant relationship between frequency of attendance for county respondents and variables previously demonstrated to be related to attendance: frequency of Bible reading, prayer, and viewing or listening to religious programming, all of which are alternative measures of religiosity, and marital status. Expected, but notably absent, are significant correlations between frequency of attendance and education, age, gender, presence of children in the household. Education level is positively associated with congregational and denominational switchers, two groups who show a strong positive association with frequency of attendance. Additionally, congregational switchers are more likely to be younger, married, and have children living in their households, while denominational switchers are more frequent bible readers. Distance demonstrates a significant, inverse relationship to frequency of attendance, as expected. Residents of the county prefer to travel short distances to church and those who live closer are more frequent attendees.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Where do Wayne County, West Virginia, or Appalachia fit in the religious landscape? This investigation brings to light important weaknesses in the published data for religion in the US. Wayne County residents have characteristics in terms of membership and attendance rates similar to the conservative South. It has been posited (Shortridge 1976) that Appalachia may be a worst case scenario for errors in privately-funded church censuses which solicit data from established denominational organizations. Appalachia since the nineteenth century has been characterized by the relatively higher importance of kinship ties compared to denominational ties in religion (Albanese 1992). Thus, many churches go unreported in the censuses.

It is unclear, however, whether underestimates in published data like those observed in this study are limited to Appalachia. The individualistic nature of US religion in general has created thousands (and the number is growing) of unaffiliated churches, including some of the largest mega-churches, churches with over 1,000 and as many as 20,000 members. The growth of mega-churches has “a clear connection to declining religious brand [denominational] loyalties” (Djupe 2000, 87). Furthermore, some denominational churches have embraced the trend by setting aside their denominational ties and pursuing the community church model. If Wayne County, WV, with a stable population of residents and churches, was underestimated due to the presence of non-denominational and community churches, areas of rapid growth are likely to add many unaffiliated, and thus uncounted, churches each year. What effect these un denominational/community churches will have on mapping and understanding the religious culture of the US is unknown, but certainly a valuable element of future research.

More local censuses and studies are needed to determine if, as was the case in this study, local religious culture shapes the teaching of the new unaffiliated churches or if these churches are perhaps a counter-cultural element in the religious landscape. In our increasingly digital society, there may be more religious data forthcoming as emergency response districts collect precise coordinates and street addresses for all structures, including churches (and perhaps church names and denominational affiliation), in their districts. Availability of this data nationwide may provide a means to evaluate and expand the private religious censuses to include unaffiliated bodies.

Field study and surveys of Wayne County, WV residents and the subsequent analyses provide a reasonable match on traditional variables that affect church attendance (e.g., the correlation between frequency of bible reading, prayer, church switching, and attendance), but
additionally provide insights about the role of local geographic factors among traditional factors. Although family reasons were among the most important reasons for church choice, short commute times were the rule. The large number and broad distribution of churches makes close access possible for all residents, who prefer to attend close churches and rarely leave their immediate surroundings to attend a distant church. In harmony with previous studies, congregational and denominational switchers cited family influence or marriage as the most important reasons for their change, but moving and proximity were mentioned more frequently than in previous studies (e.g., Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1995). Switchers and the least frequent attendees were more aware that their church choice depended on proximity than non-switchers or the most frequent attendees.

Commute distance to church varied by denomination, individuals’ history of switching, urban-rural residence location, and frequency of attendance. Urban residents, members of the Church of God, United Methodist Church, and nondenominational churches, non-switchers, and the most and least frequent churchgoers tended to travel the shortest distances to church (Table 3). Rural residents, Pentecostals and Roman Catholics, congregational and denominational switchers, and intermittent attendees drove the farthest. For religious switchers, particularly congregational switchers, seemingly greater devotion to their new church resulted in greater distance traveled. Indeed, congregational switchers appeared to possess the qualities, such as greater devotion (measured in terms of drive time and statistical relationship to frequency of attendance), normally attributed to and to a greater degree than denominational switchers.

The research presented here provides an approximation of neighborhood based on church commute time. The concept and definition of neighborhood is often problematic. In segregation analysis, for example, census tracts, which may be only a couple of city blocks, often serve as urban “neighborhoods.” Resulting segregation indices are then adduced as evidence for the level social interaction among groups from different “neighborhoods.” Sands and Smock (1994) chose an arbitrary travel time—five minutes—as the limits of a resident’s neighborhood, then concluded that “the place of worship of most Detroit area households is not found in their immediate vicinity” (195). It could be strongly argued that church commute times are a good measure of neighborhood. Because worshippers who see each other regularly are likely to share a sense of community with their neighbors, perhaps a better definition of neighborhood should include travel time to church. The remarkable agreement of the present study with Sands and Smock (1994) suggests that a local church neighborhood in the US encompasses those within approximately 10-15 minute commute. The frequency with which survey respondents listed “close to home,” “in my neighborhood,” or “in the community” as a reason for church choice corroborates this theory. Further comparison of church commute times with other attempts to define neighborhoods seems a productive avenue for future analysis.
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The Sanctification of

Mormonism’s Historical Geography

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ABSTRACT

Institutional hierarchies often attempt to imbue space with meaning. The LDS Church’s interest in its history – and particularly its historical geography – has increased significantly since 1995. Ambitious and costly restorations have commenced and temples have been constructed at three historical sites, contributing to the sanctification of these places. A collective sense of heritage has traditionally flavored to Mormon identity. In the face of rapid worldwide growth, Mormon leaders are increasingly seeking to anchor and root the religion in place, creating a sacred historical geography that all Mormons can feel a part of, thereby enhancing a trans-national sense of Mormon identity.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the increasingly prominent role of place in the construction of Mormon history and in the promotion of a common Mormon identity. 1 I suggest that the historic spaces of Mormonism in the Eastern and Midwestern United States are becoming sanctified from the “top-down,” as the LDS Church hierarchy engineers the creation of “sacred space.” This emerging sacred historical Mormon geography, in turn, plays an increasingly important role in the ongoing construction of Mormon identity.

This research was guided by two questions: what changes have occurred at Mormon historical sites, especially recently, and what do these changes mean? 1

1 This article represents a concise summary of the author’s more comprehensive doctoral dissertation: Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites from Points of Interest to Sacred Space (Madsen 2003). The comparison of Mormon historical sites to Mecca is apt. Many have already acknowledged the similarities in terms of their ability to draw visitors. In this sense, amusement parks and sports venues may also be considered “meccas.” But I believe the comparison of Mormon historical sites to Mecca is increasingly appropriate at another level. Mecca itself is a sacred space. For Muslims, the Kaaba transcends the mundane and profane spaces that surround it. In addition, Mecca anchors the Muslim religion in place, providing a spatial orientation for all the faith’s adherents. In this article I suggest that the same can increasingly be said of Mormon historical sites. The term “Mormon” here refers to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hereafter this organization will be referred to as the LDS Church or simply the Church. Similarly, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be referred to as Latter-day Saints, Saints, Mormons, or simply members. The LDS Church is the largest and wealthiest “Mormon” denomination, but numerous other sects trace their origins to Joseph Smith. The Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), for example, claims a worldwide membership of 250,000. This church also owns many historic Mormon properties. In this paper, however, I only examine the efforts of the LDS Church.
employed both archival and qualitative research methods. On the archival side I
examined numerous sources for indications of change in the way these sites are written
about and described. On the qualitative side I utilized participant observation at the sites
themselves along with interviews in order to ascertain the contemporary views of LDS
Church leaders, bureaucrats, and missionary tour guides (See Madsen 2003, 268-274).

**AMERICAN SACRED SPACE**

Sacred places might strike us as being old and static, effectively fixed in place,
but they are actually more fluid and dynamic, temporary and mobile. Indeed, there is no
reason to suppose that the processes inherent in sacred space creation should diminish
over time. Some scholars, aware of the potentially powerful influence of sacred places,
recognize that modern institutional hierarchies can play an important role in the
“creation” of sacred space. Rowland Sherrill, for one, maintains that “sensibilities bent
on [works] of consecration” do indeed exist today. He believes that certain places
undoubtedly await only the needed “organization of memory, emotion, and intellect” in
order to transform them into sacred places (Sherrill 1995, 333). Sherrill goes on to
identify the United States as a prime location for works of spatial consecration. Sacred
places, he argues, provide for believers a sense of the “home place.” Thus, “the
‘homeless’ condition of the modern American self would only serve to intensify the
desires and efforts of the “sacralizing sensibility,” even if it “might need to invent new
experiential and interpretive tactics to gain sacred grounds” (Sherrill 1995, 333). America, it would seem, is ripe for the “creation” of sacred space.

The leadership of the LDS Church may very well possess just such a “sacralizing
sensibility.” The strict hierarchical nature of the Mormon faith, combined with its rapidly
expanding and increasingly diverse membership, makes it a likely candidate for “works
of consecration” that bind adherents to the land. Today the LDS Church manages more
than forty historical sites in North America. Tours are conducted at thirty-five of these
sites and nineteen have visitors centers (Ostling and Ostling 1999, 241). Figure 1
identifies the most significant Mormon historical sites. Tens of thousands, and in some
cases hundreds of thousands, of visitors annually visit these places. My research has
focused primarily on three areas: Palmyra, New York, Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo,
Illinois.

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2 The LDS Church is led by a president, regarded as a prophet by the membership. The president Oversees
the “First Presidency” and “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.” These fifteen men, holding lifetime
positions, are the final authority on all matters of LDS Church policy and doctrine. A distinct chain-of-
command exists from this body to the smallest congregation. Doctrinal purity is strictly enforced. Perhaps
no other comparable religion (in terms of size and visibility) is governed in such a theocratic manner.

3 Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo are small, predominantly non-Mormon towns. Several specific Mormon
historical sites are found in the vicinity of each town.
Although owning, occupying, managing, and visiting the actual places associated with early Mormonism are activities currently valued by the Church and its members, this has not always been the case. Early Mormons established themselves in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois before finally settling in the remote American West. For decades the Church was effectively divorced from these Eastern and Midwestern sites and Mormons were not in a position – nor were they welcome – to return. History, nevertheless, remained a vital aspect of the Latter-day Saints’ collective identity. Non-Mormon writers Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling note that within the Church: “there is a very real sense in which the church’s history is its theology . . . just as creedal churches have official statements of faith, the Mormon Church tends to have official versions of sacred history (Ostling and Ostling 1999, 245).” Not until the twentieth century, however, did the LDS Church, or, in many cases, individual members of the LDS

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4 See Madsen 2003, pages 3-6 for a much more detailed analysis of the connection between Mormon history and identity.
Church, begin to reacquire Eastern and Midwestern properties significant to the Church’s history.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LDS CHURCH**

Joseph Smith Jr. was born to a poor farming family in Sharon, Vermont on December 23, 1805. The history (and unfolding geography) of the early Church, however, begins in earnest in the Erie Canal boomtown of Palmyra, near Rochester in western New York State, where the Smith family settled in 1816. Joseph Smith claimed that in 1820, at the age of fourteen, he saw a vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ in a grove of trees near his home. The site of this event later became known as the “Sacred Grove” (Figure 2).

In 1823, then seventeen-year-old Joseph reported his second major heavenly manifestation. An angel appeared to the youth in the family’s log home and directed him to a nearby hill (to become known as the Hill Cumorah) in which was deposited an ancient record written upon thin plates of gold (Figure 3). In 1830 Smith published his translation of these writings as the *Book of Mormon*, an alleged history of the ancient inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. On April 6, 1830, The “Church of Jesus Christ” was officially organized by twenty-four-year-old Joseph Smith in the log home of farmer Peter Whitmer in Fayette, New York, a small village southeast of
Palmyra\(^5\) (Figure 4).

Smith immediately dispatched missionaries for the new religion. One set of missionaries made the arduous journey from New York to the Indian Territories west of Missouri to preach the message of the new faith to Native Americans, whom the *Book of Mormon* identified as remnants of the House of Israel. En route, the Mormon missionaries converted several Campbellites in northeast Ohio. The new faith continued to thrive in Ohio and in late 1830 Joseph Smith instructed all of his followers to gather there. In 1831 the Church officially established its headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio, and it became the home of many new converts from Canada and the East. Within four years, 1,500 to 2,000 Mormons resided in the vicinity of Kirtland (Barlow 1999, 143).

The Church maintained its headquarters in Kirtland from 1830 to 1838. During this period, Mormon doctrine and organization continued to develop, converts continued to gather, and the Church’s first temple was constructed. Joseph Smith received over sixty revelations, now canonized as Mormon scripture, in the vicinity of Kirtland, and numerous heavenly manifestations were recorded there. By 1838, however, most of the faithful Church members residing in and around Kirtland had moved en masse to western Missouri, the very frontier of American settlement at the time. This move was necessitated by growing hostility towards the Church.

The Mormons had established a presence in Jackson County, Missouri as early as 1831, when Joseph Smith designated this area as “Zion,” the destined gathering place of the Saints (Allen and Leonard 1976, 59). Although Smith continued to reside primarily in Kirtland until 1838, many Mormons, beginning in 1831, made their way to Missouri and several Mormon settlements emerged. After the mass migration from Ohio in 1838, converts continued to stream into Missouri. Ultimately, in this state too, conflict with non-Mormons compelled the Saints to flee.\(^6\)

The Mormons then settled along a bend of the Mississippi River in northwestern Illinois in 1839. “Nauvoo” soon emerged as the new Mormon capital. By 1845, Nauvoo, with a population well over 20,000, had become the largest city in Illinois (Foote 1997, 250). Conflict again arose, however, and in 1844 Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob as he awaited trial in nearby Carthage (Figure 5).

Following the death of Joseph Smith, most of the Saints – now under the leadership of Brigham Young – made preparations to leave the more settled portions of the continent and seek refuge in

\(^5\) It was not until 1838 that the official name of the Church was designated as “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” As early as 1830, nonmembers began using the term “Mormon” or “Mormonite” to refer to followers of Joseph Smith (Allen and Leonard 1976, 47). Smith’s followers revered the new Church as a renewal of the original church established by Jesus Christ.

\(^6\) Some factors that bred discord included unease over peculiar Mormon beliefs, fear of Mormon political domination, and Mormon opposition to slavery. Over a dozen Latter-day Saints were killed during the “Mormon War” of 1838 (Allen and Leonard 1976, 82-84).
the vast intermountain region of the American West. Mounting violence in 1846 forced many Mormons to flee Nauvoo in the middle of winter. They constructed “Winter Quarters,” a makeshift settlement on a site near present-day Omaha, Nebraska. Finally, in 1847, Brigham Young led the vanguard company of Mormon pioneers on a trek of over 1,000 miles from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake Valley.

RECLAMATION OF MORMON HISTORICAL SITES

The early Mormon community essentially left everything behind as it moved from one state to another before finally settling in the West. There Latter-day Saints actively sought for and received some measure of isolation. Even if the Church had been interested in returning to the East, they would not have been welcomed back. Indeed, populations in Missouri, Illinois, and New York harbored rabid anti-Mormon sentiment well into the twentieth century. As a result, the LDS Church lost almost all connection to the places central to its early history. In 1880 when the Church celebrated the fifty-year anniversary of its organization in western New York, “no attempt was made to commemorate the sites of early Mormonism in the East” (Foote 1997, 225). In that same year the LDS Church made only a half-hearted effort to acquire the extant Mormon Temple in Kirtland, Ohio, a highly significant and sacred structure built at great sacrifice by the Saints in 1836 (Figure 6). A court ultimately awarded ownership of the temple to a rival sect.

In time, however, the Saints exhibited a greater interest not only in their past, but in the places central to that past. The turn of the century coincided with the emergence of a new generation of laity and leadership within the Church, with the death of the older generation who had witnessed the Church’s formation and crossed the Plains. Church officials increasingly emphasized and promoted the unique history of the Church to its membership as a means of enhancing a collective sense of identity. At this time the forces that had prevented them from re-establishing an Eastern presence also began to dwindle. Accordingly, Church authorities and rank-and-file members began to reacquire some of the key historical sites of Mormonism in the East and Midwest.

Despite this surge of interest in the early-twentieth century, enthusiasm for developing Mormon historical sites was not generally sustained. For so long, Mormonism’s early history had been divorced from place, and this general tendency persisted. Historical memory remained an important element of Mormon identity, but most within the faith apparently felt little need to commemorate that sacred history in place. In 1909, for example, the LDS Church passed on an opportunity to purchase Joseph Smith’s old Nauvoo property (Bingham 2002, 16). And, although the Church made a concerted effort to acquire historic properties in the Palmyra area, it did not
appear to be overly anxious about it. In the early twentieth century when a local
landowner insisted on an exorbitantly high price for his property near the Hill Cumorah,
for example, a church representative told him: “The Church has existed for 100 years
without possession of Cumorah and still seemed to be doing alright without it” (Packer
1975, 27). The LDS Church’s elaborate activities during its 1930 centennial celebration
further illustrate the lack of attachment between Latter-day Saints and their historical
sites. Even though the Church was, by this time, in possession of several key historic
properties, no major commemorations were held east of Utah (Foote 1997, 255).7

As the twentieth century progressed, however, the Church hierarchy developed a
clearer vision for their historical sites. The LDS Church became increasingly visible and
less isolated as worldwide missionary efforts produced rapid international growth.
During this outward-looking time, some LDS Church leaders recognized the potential of
world’s fairs and expositions to further promote a positive Mormon image. Millions
visited the Mormon pavilions, where Church representatives tried to address common
misperceptions among potential converts. In the process Church authorities also learned
about effective displays and presentation methods.8

Inspired by the success of the Church’s world’s fairs pavilions, the LDS Church
hierarchy came to view Mormon historical sites in the Eastern and Midwestern United
States in a new light – as potential proselytizing hubs. The utilitarian potential of
Mormon historical sites to attract converts thus gained preeminence. Accordingly, the
LDS Church set out in the 1960s and 70s to more or less convert their historical
properties into permanent exhibits. Large and elaborate visitors centers designed with
non-Mormons in mind were constructed at

7 It is significant to note that the places associated with LDS history did not play a significant role in these
early twentieth-century commemorations. Although commemorations at the close of the twentieth century,
such as the 150th anniversary of the exodus to the Salt Lake Valley (1997), undoubtedly led to a greater
historical emphasis within the church, the actual spaces associated with these events, as shall be seen,
figured much more prominently.

8 The LDS Church is no longer involved in these events. Church leaders at this time also realized that they
were not taking full advantage of the situation in Salt Lake, where thousands of non-Mormon travelers
annually visited Mormon headquarters. In 1963 and then again in 1978, the Church built elaborate visitors
centers in “Temple Square” targeting non-Mormon visitors.
it greater centralized control, and Salt Lake increasingly exerted more influence over its far-flung historical properties.\(^9\)

With these costly visitors centers in place, it was now vital to attract crowds. Popular historical restorations such as Colonial Williamsburg offered a reason for optimism. Accordingly, the Church, hoping to tap into growing national interest in heritage tourism, became much more active at its historical sites in preservation and restoration work. LDS missionary tour guides in the mid-to-late twentieth century made a concerted effort to portray early Mormons as archetypical American frontier pioneers, and modern Mormons as mainstream Christians. They played up Mormon connections to the American past and downplayed the distinctive characteristics of the new religion. The places associated with early Mormonism were presented to the public as historical sites, with little emphasis on any inherent sacrality (see Madsen 2003, 95-98).

**HISTORICAL EMPHASIS**

This historical emphasis in the mid to late twentieth century corresponded with LDS theological attitudes regarding space. The LDS Church had always rejected the idea of shrines, which it viewed as pagan or archaic. In 1966 Bruce R. McConkie, a high-ranking Church authority, writing specifically on the subject of “Mormon doctrine,” emphatically stated that: “shrines play no part in true worship.” He continues:

> The [Latter-day] Saints go to temples and meetinghouses, kneel before holy altars, perform sacred ordinances, and are there taught the doctrines of salvation. But they do not worship at these places because some holy being once stood there, or because a bone or hank of hair of a dead person has been exhumed and is there displayed (McConkie 1966, 711).

In short, Mormons do not venerate sites deemed sacred by virtue of past events. The LDS Church’s long separation from its historical hearth for half a century shifted emphasis away from the sites of early Mormon history and towards the actual events associated with that history. Accordingly, as the LDS Church reclaimed its historical geography, its leaders reaffirmed that the sites themselves were not inherently sacred.

Writing about the Sacred Grove, site of Joseph Smith’s “First Vision,” this same church authority firmly stated:

> The Father and the Son both stood in the Sacred Grove in the Spring of 1820, but this greatest of all recorded theophanies did not make that grove of trees a shrine. . . It is not a shrine in the sense that many denominations have shrines, *nor is there any sanctity now attached to the trees and the land there located.* But it is a spot held sacred in the hearts of those who believe in the truth of salvation, because they glory in the transcendent event that took place there (McConkie 1966, 711. Emphasis mine.)

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\(^9\) Competing interests within both the Church’s leadership and bureaucracy have vied for supremacy in the management of Mormon historical sites since the latter half of the twentieth century. Specifically, the Historical Department and the Missionary Department of the LDS Church have found it necessary to compromise on a number of matters (See Madsen 2003, 98-128).
McConkie emphasized that no sanctity is attached to the Sacred Grove itself, and that only the event that transpired there is sacred. His views regarding the sacrality of other Mormon historical sites, in which “the greatest of all recorded theophanies” did not take place, can thus be imagined. If the Sacred Grove is not an inherently sacred place, other Mormon historical sites in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and so on must surely not possess any sanctity either.

Latter-day Saint writers’ descriptions of their historical sites in the mid-twentieth century reflected the theological view espoused by church leaders. In 1953 Alma P. Burton, a member of the faculty of Brigham Young University, published a book entitled: *Mormon Trail from Vermont to Utah: A Guide to the Historic Places of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. In the forward to this volume, Harold Glen Clark wrote:

> It is a noble and interesting task to prepare a guide for those who wish to visit the points of interest in the early History of the Church. Our purpose in publishing this booklet is to help you see the soil from which a great people have come. *We do not venerate or worship the historical buildings and landmarks described herein.* However, we feel that your visit to them with the help of this guide will permit you to measure the progress of the Church . . . (Burton 1953, 3. Emphasis mine).

The opening text makes clear that this book is a guide to the historical points of interest of the LDS Church and that any veneration of these sites beyond appreciation of the history that occurred there is inappropriate. The words “spiritual,” “hallowed,” and “reverent” are never used in the text, and the word “sacred” only appears incidentally three other times when referring to past events. Aside from the “Sacred Grove,” the term is never used to describe any places in the text.

In 1965 another Mormon writer, R. Don Oscarson, wrote a similar travel book, *The Travelers’ Guide to Historic Mormon America* (Oscarson 1965). This guide too contains numerous photographs, maps, and historical narratives. Once again, the terms “sacred,” “spiritual,” “reverent,” and “hallowed” are nowhere to be found. And in 1986 Mormon scholars Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie, writing in the *Journal of Cultural Geography*, declared that Mormon historical sites in places like Kirtland and Nauvoo “remain important only for their historical values” (Jackson and Henrie 1986, 100).

These authors reinforced the Church-directed sentiment of the mid to late twentieth century: Mormon historical sites are just that – historical points of interest – and they should be recognized and celebrated by all history buffs as an integral part of the American heritage. By the end of the twentieth century, however, this primarily historical emphasis gave way to a more spiritualistic interpretation of Mormon historical sites.10

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10 This shift in attitude from historical to sacred, of course, is not clear-cut and precise. Many Mormons prior to 1995 felt a spiritual attraction to early Mormon historical sites. Since 1995, however, the spiritual emphasis placed on these sites by the LDS Church hierarchy has increased. See Madsen 2003, 234-240 for a discussion of the ambiguity inherent in the gradual shift at Mormon historical sites from secular history to
MORMON HISTORICAL SITES SINCE 1995:
EMERGING SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS

Significant changes have occurred at Mormon historical sites since 1995. Much of this can be attributed to the efforts and influence of Gordon B. Hinckley. Hinckley spent his early career as an LDS Church employee, charged with the task of producing media to introduce Mormon and non-Mormon audiences to the Mormon past. He spent a great deal of time in the church’s archives poring over pioneer journal accounts for inspiration as he produced film strips and radio programs. Hinckley developed both an affinity and an affection for Mormon history. Of this time in his life, Hinckley’s biographer writes: “the more he studied and wrote [about Church history], the more real these images became to him” (Dew 1996, 101). Hinckley also developed a keen sense for how this “heritage” might be instilled in the hearts of Church members.

In 1958 Hinckley made the jump from the Church bureaucracy to its ecclesiastical hierarchy, eventually assuming the presidency of the LDS Church in 1995. Since then Hinckley has overseen a surge of church investment and activity at Mormon historical sites, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars.

New York has been the site of much activity. Since 1995 the LDS Church has invested over $10 million in historical restorations in western New York alone, not counting the $5 million temple to be discussed later. The Smith Family log home, painstakingly restored in 1999, is one example (Figure 8). In spring 2000 the Church announced a three-year, $15 million plan to expand visitor facilities and restore and rebuild several landmarks in Kirtland, Ohio (Arave 2000). This project was completed in 2003. A state road was re-routed and a compact Mormon village, painstakingly modeled after 1830s Kirtland, was created. The Church spent $5 million alone to re-route the state road (Arave 2000; Lewellen 2002). Nauvoo, one of the most popular Mormon historical sites (250,000 annual visitors), has also seen its share of Church investment. Over 200 Mormon missionaries are assigned to work in Nauvoo (population 1,000). The $30 million Nauvoo Temple, completed in 2002, will be described later.

Unlike earlier Church investments that emphasized missionary work among non-Mormons, however, this more recent surge of investment accompanies an emerging, spiritual emphasis at Mormon historical sites geared more towards members of the sacred space. It is also important to note that doctrinal resistance to site sanctification in the LDS Church is not unique. For centuries Protestantism in general resisted Catholic-style venerations of shrines and holy relics. In a more secular vein, nineteenth-century Americans were generally reluctant to commemorate key events and heroes so as to avoid the trappings of monarchy.

11 See Madsen 2003, 64-82 for a much more detailed account of Hinckley’s efforts.
This change, like all activity at Mormon historical sites, was directed from the top down, with officials in Salt Lake City guiding the transformation.

Hinckley had spent a career seeking to enhance a shared sense of heritage among the membership, and he often utilized the actual spaces of Mormon history to accomplish this. His writings indicate that he personally came to regard these places as sacred (Dew 1996, 91). As the president of a strictly hierarchical organization, revered by millions as a prophet, his influence is keenly felt in the redefinition of Mormon historical sites, as the heretofore primarily historical points of interest are being transformed into sacred places.

The “Whitney Store” in Kirtland, Ohio provides a good example of how the uses and meanings of specific sites central to the LDS Church’s early history have changed over time. The Whitney store was a center of LDS Church activity in the Kirtland area in the 1830s. Joseph Smith often met with Church leaders there and it was in that building that he received several important revelations. Most Latter-day Saints left Kirtland in 1838 and the property was lost to the Church. Nearly 130 years later an LDS Church member from Utah purchased the Whitney Store. At that time it was being used as a “beer parlor” (ironically, the commandment forbidding Mormons to use alcohol was received in this building). The LDS leadership did not express interest in the property until 1976, when the Church finally purchased the structure. Initially it

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12 When the Church invested millions in its historical sites in the 1960s and 70s, it did so with the expectation that these places would greatly facilitate missionary work. Forty years later, tens of thousands of visitors do visit Mormon historical sites, and the Missionary Department of the Church does engage in missionary work, just not the kind envisioned earlier due to the fact that the vast majority of visitors to Mormon historical sites are already Mormon. Historical site missionaries today focus on the “proselytization” of their own via “referrals,” the practice of obtaining from Church members the name and contact information of non-member friends. By passing these referrals along to missionaries in other missions, the historical site missionaries believe that they are playing an important role in the diffusion of the Mormon faith. See Madsen 2003, 163-171.

13 Hinckley’s ascension to the top of the LDS Church hierarchy in 1995 coincided with an important anniversary. 1997 marked the sesquicentennial of the famous pioneer trek to the Salt Lake Valley. Hinckley ensured that the commemoration of this event would involve all LDS Church members, in spite of the fact (indeed, I would suggest, because of the fact) that the majority of the membership has no personal, familial connection to this event. The slogan “Faith in Every Footstep” became known to Latter-day Saints worldwide and numerous commemorative events, including historical re-enactments, took place in dozens of different countries (See Madsen 2003, 133-137). The LDS Church hierarchy’s use of pioneer symbolism contrasts quite interestingly with prior uses of the same symbol. Historian John Bodnar described how the “pioneer” has typically been used in the United States as a local, vernacular symbol to compete with nationalistic symbols promoted by more powerful business and government interests (Bodnar 1992). Yet now, at the dawning of the twenty first century, the pioneer symbol has been appropriated by a powerful institutional hierarchy as a trans-national symbol, one that links the worldwide membership to a Utah-based religion and, perhaps more importantly, to each other as well.
was used as a residence for the local missionaries assigned to work in Kirtland. In 1983 the Church finally restored the Whitney Store to what is believed to be its 1830s appearance. Following this restoration, the Church began to promote the site as a historical property and missionaries began to conduct tours. Currently the Whitney Store is enthusiastically presented to Mormon visitors as a very sacred place (Figure 9).\textsuperscript{14}

As demonstrated in the example above, the subtle sanctification of Mormon historical sites is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in the actual tours currently conducted by the missionary "tour guides." These missionaries increasingly emphasize the inherent sanctity of the sites to their (primarily Mormon) visitors by invoking President Hinckley’s own words. For example, my first experience at Mormon historical sites as a researcher came in the summer of 2000. At that time, I engaged in participant observation at the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center near Palmyra, New York. I was struck by the regularity with which the missionaries informed visitors that they were standing on holy ground. Sister Smith, for example, made the following comment to a group of LDS visitors:

You know, President Hinckley has been here five times in the last five years. He says you are walking on sacred ground while you are here.\textsuperscript{15}

Later that same year in at the Smith log home in Palmyra, Sister Taylor told her group: “This farm was dedicated for us to come here so we can learn more about Jesus Christ,” a rather curious beginning to a tour of a “historical site.” She then underscored the holiness of the site by stating:

These are sacred places. President Hinckley said that next to the tomb where they laid the Savior’s body, this is the most sacred place on earth.

I soon realized that almost all of the missionaries at this site repeated some variation of this last statement in each of their tours. This same missionary later told another group:

I want you to know that the Spirit of the Lord dwells within these places. These are sacred places.

Episodes like this one are repeated countless times at numerous Mormon historical sites, as the spiritual nature of the sites is promoted even at the expense of its historicity. At the Whitney Store in 2001, for example, the first thing that Sister Davis told her tour group was that “lots of historical things happened here, but I want to focus on the spiritual things.” Sister Young referred to the Whitney Store as a “sacred” and

\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, at one point in the “tour” Mormon visitors are invited to offer personal prayers in a particularly sacred room within the structure. A box of tissue paper – one of the few anachronistic objects in the building - is strategically placed in the room in case visitors become emotional. When did the Whitney Store become sacred? Was it sacred when it was built in 1819; when Joseph Smith met there with Church members; after the Saints left Kirtland; when it was used as a beer hall; when a Church member purchased it; when the Church purchased it; when the Church restored it? Was it sacred, then not sacred, then sacred again? See Madsen 2003, pages 185-193.

\textsuperscript{15} All interview quotations in this article are pulled from field notes compiled by the author between 2000 and 2003 (see Madsen 2003). Pseudonyms have been employed.
“holy” place several times during her tour of the building. Back in Palmyra Sister Brown told her tour group:

I will tell you lots of historical stuff, but I want you to remember what you’ve felt. Don’t try to remember everything I say.

In 2002 I witnessed the same sort of presentations in Nauvoo and Winter quarters. These are just a few of countless examples of the verbal sanctification of Mormon historical sites that I observed between 2000 and 2002.

Historical site missionaries prior to 1995 may have been interested in spiritual matters, but the emphasis on spirituality at Mormon historical sites has clearly increased since then. In 2000 I shared this observation with Sister Smith, who was then serving in the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center. She replied,

Oh yes, it certainly has changed. It’s more on the spirit now. I have noticed a change in just the past few years. Some of the older missionaries who were trained three years ago still focus on the history, but now the focus is on the spirit.16

She then stated matter-of-factly, “We want to give people the sense that they are on holy ground.” Another missionary offered this: “They’ve changed the focus of these sites from what happened here to what it means to us.”17

OTHER MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

There are other means of sanctification as well. For example, the most recent edition of the LDS scriptures was released in 1999. The LDS canon consist of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, the latter two comprising Joseph Smith’s inspired writings and revelations. The latter three are commonly bound together as a single volume for convenience. One of the unique features of the 1999 edition of this “triple combination” is the addition of high-quality maps and photographs of Mormon historical sites.

Some earlier editions of LDS scripture contained a few simple, black-and-white maps, but there was no gazetteer and no accompanying text. By contrast, the 1999 version of the triple combination contains seven high-quality color maps. An index of place names (nearly 200) and several pages of explanatory text accompany them. In addition, the 1999 triple combination contains eighteen high-quality color photographs of key historical sites. In all, twenty-three pages of maps, photos, chronology, indexes, and explanatory text have been added to Mormon scripture.

16 Historical site missionaries – like all LDS missionaries – volunteer their time, typically serving between 18 and 24 months. They receive special training (usually lasting about three weeks) at Church-run “Missionary Training Centers” prior to assuming their field assignments. Sister Smith’s comments confirm that the LDS Church is actively training its historical site missionaries to emphasize the sacred nature of the sites.
17 The recent verbal and written rhetoric of Church leaders (including and in addition to Gordon B. Hinckley) also contributes to the sanctification of Mormon historical sites. See Madsen 2003, 228-230.
The inclusion of maps and photographs of Mormon historical sites in Mormon scripture sends a message. To LDS faithful, the implication is that these places are sacred. Just as maps and photos of the “Holy Land” accompany the Bible, maps and photos of North America’s sacred sites now accompany Mormon scripture.

The ever-more spiritualistic interpretation of Mormon historical sites at the close of the twentieth century is evident in other forms as well. For example, changes are evident in the written texts produced about these sites. A newly released volume dealing with the historic geography of Mormonism can be compared with the Mormon historical site guidebooks described earlier. The first installment in the new six-volume set was released by a Church-owned publisher in 1999. It provides a detailed and comprehensive description of the hundreds of places that figure into the history of the Church, with 128 maps and almost 1000 photographs. The most striking feature of this book series, however, is its title: *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites*. The title of the series sends a clear message. Although the vast majority of the sites described in the book must be considered quite mundane (e.g. the general store in Mendon, New York where Brigham Young “took $4.36 of merchandise in 1829”), they nevertheless fall under the general title “sacred places” by virtue of their connection to the LDS past (Berrett, ed. 1999, 220).

In the preface to these volumes the editor, LaMar C. Berrett, also establishes the inherently sacred nature of these historic Mormon sites. It begins:

> When the Prophet Moses came to the mountain of God and the burning bush, the Lord said unto him, ‘Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.’
> Through the ages, the location at which sacred historical events occurred have traditionally become holy. How holy or how sacred a site is depends on the understanding of those beholding it (Berrett 1999, vii, viii).

These brief prefatory remarks project a notable message. First, the author equates Mormon historical sites with Mt. Sinai. Berrett also acknowledges that a process of sanctification exists: “locations at which sacred historical events occurred” can assume some measure of sacrality over time. This begs the question of how sacrality gets ascribed there. The author rightly believes that it “depends on the understanding of those beholding it.” Thus, if people believe that a certain site is sacred, it is. So how do people come to believe that a site is sacred? Being told that it is by respected, well-educated authorities on Church history must surely be a factor.

**TEMPLES**

In addition to these examples of sanctification are more literal constructions of sacred meaning at Mormon historical sites. President Hinckley’s decision to build sacred Mormon temples at three key historical sites represents an important development in the creation of a sacred Mormon geography. Between 2000 and 2002, Hinckley oversaw the construction of temples in Palmyra, Winter Quarters, and Nauvoo.

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18 Bookcraft published the first volume of *Sacred Places*. This company was subsequently purchased by Church-owned “Deseret Book,” which published the remaining volumes.
Temples are highly significant places of worship for LDS Church members and only approved members in good standing are allowed to enter them and participate in the activities specific to it. Mormons regard their temples as sacred space and there is a sense among them that, to some extent, these structures serve to “sacralize” the surrounding area (Cowen 1989, 222). Thus, the erection of a temple, in Mormon theology, is concomitant with the establishment of sacred space in a heretofore-profane location. The sanctification of the site is complete when a high-ranking Church leader, usually the president, formally “dedicates” the temple to the Lord in a special ceremony.

The first LDS temple was constructed in Kirtland, Ohio in 1836. As indicated earlier, it was ultimately lost to the LDS Church. Joseph Smith called for the construction of a temple in Nauvoo, but he died before the task was accomplished. Although the Nauvoo Temple was completed after Smith’s death, the westward-moving Saints were forced to abandon it. An arsonist later set fire to the sacred edifice in 1848 and a tornado in 1850 destroyed most of the remaining structure. The Salt Lake Temple took forty years to construct. By 1910 only four temples, all in Utah, were in operation. Prior to 1995 there were forty-six Mormon temples worldwide, and following a recent wave of unprecedented temple construction, there are now 120 temples in operation as of July 2005.

President Hinckley’s announcements regarding the construction of temples in Palmyra, Winter Quarters, and Nauvoo came as a surprise because the location of temples has always been demographically determined. Even during the rapid temple building years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, site selection was based on wherever there was the greatest perceived need (i.e. wherever large numbers of Latter-day Saints found themselves greatly distanced from a temple). But the Palmyra Temple, for the first time, broke this pattern. Based on the number of Latter-day Saints in western New York (about 18,000), there was no expectation of a temple anywhere in the area in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, in February of 1999, Hinckley announced that a temple would be constructed in Palmyra (Figure 10). Accordingly, a new “temple district” – the smallest in the country – was organized.

Disregarding demographic need, Hinckley chose to build a temple in Palmyra by virtue of the site itself. “This is where the First Vision occurred,” said Hinckley, “and I think it appropriate that we build a House of the Lord on this ground” (Ensign 1999, 76). The presence of a temple thus serves to further

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19 The site of the Palmyra Temple does not coincide exactly with the site of the “First Vision.” Indeed, the precise location of this event is unknown.
improve this location with holiness.\textsuperscript{20}

The LDS Church leadership took additional steps to endow the Palmyra Temple with special significance. Shortly after construction began, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley announced that it would be dedicated on April 6, 2000. April 6 is the most sacred and significant date in Mormon theology. Joseph Smith taught that April 6 was the date of Jesus Christ’s birth. He also officially organized the Church on April 6. Brigham Young laid the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple on April 6, 1853 and the completed temple was dedicated exactly forty years later on April 6, 1893. Significantly, no other LDS temple was dedicated on that most sacred of Mormon dates until the Palmyra Temple in 2000.\textsuperscript{21}

The Church leadership then made another unprecedented move with the dedication of the Palmyra Temple. Temple dedications are sacred and singular events for Church members. Only Latter-day Saints living in the area served by the temple and deemed worthy by their leaders and may participate in the dedicatory services.\textsuperscript{22} Hinckley, however, directed that the dedicatory proceedings of the Palmyra Temple be broadcast via satellite to LDS meetinghouses throughout the United States and Canada.\textsuperscript{23} Accordingly the first dedicatory session was broadcast in twelve languages to meetinghouses in twelve time zones. An estimated one and a half million Latter-day Saints participated in the dedication of the Palmyra Temple, by far the largest number ever to participate in that sacred ceremony (Deseret News 2001 Church Almanac 2000, 567). President Hinckley declared: “This is no ordinary day. There will never be another day quite like this in the history of this work” (Stack 2000).

With the announcement of this temple, its site selection, its embedded symbolism, the date of the dedication, and the broadcast of the dedication to over one million Latter-day Saints, the Church hierarchy made it clear to all Church members that this temple, by virtue of its location, is special. A parallel message is that this location, now graced with a sacred edifice, is more sacred.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Hinckley was very much involved in the construction of the Palmyra Temple, beginning with site selection. In January 1999 Hinckley hiked through heavy snow to the top of a hill on property once owned by the Smith family and declared it the future site for the temple. Hinckley also took special interest in the actual construction itself, overseeing the implementation of much outward symbolism. See Madsen 2003, 206-228 for further discussion of the special symbolism attached to these three temples.
\item[21] The St. George, Utah Temple was dedicated on April 6 1877.
\item[22] Following the completion of a temple and prior to its dedication, an “open house” is held, in which anyone – Mormon and non-Mormon alike – may take a tour through the temple. Once the temple is dedicated, however, only active and faithful Latter-day Saints may enter. Church members desiring to enter a temple must first obtain a “temple recommend,” issued by ecclesiastical leaders following an interview with the candidate.
\item[23] The Church had the technology to beam a closed-circuit transmission to selected LDS meetinghouses. The next step was to ensure that only faithful, “temple-worthy” Latter-day Saints would participate in the broadcast. Accordingly, local bishops were required to interview any member who wanted to participate in the dedication and issue a ticket to those deemed worthy. This pattern was followed for the Winter Quarters and Nauvoo Temple dedications.
\end{footnotes}
Two months after the dedication of the Palmyra Temple Hinckley announced that another temple would be constructed on the site where “Winter Quarters” once stood, the staging area for the Mormon pioneers’ final push to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. This temple too made little demographic sense. Hinckley’s decision to build this temple, like Palmyra, was clearly influenced more by issues of place than by issues of convenience or need. The Winter Quarters Temple was constructed adjacent to an old pioneer cemetery that contains the bodies of approximately 400 early Mormons. In fact, seven additional bodies were discovered during the construction of this temple (Figure 11). Once again, the dedication ceremonies for the temple were broadcast to meetinghouses throughout North America.24

The crowning event in the sanctification of Mormon historical space, however, began in 1999 when President Hinckley announced that the Church planned to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple. “I’ve never seen anything that elicited more excitement than this announcement,” Hinckley later recalled (Martin 1999). He also acknowledged that this temple, like Palmyra and Winter Quarters, did not make demographic sense. Indeed, the Nauvoo Temple District only comprises about 13,000 Latter-day Saints, by far the smallest in the United States.

Work on the Nauvoo Temple commenced in earnest with a cornerstone laying ceremony in November 2000. On that occasion Gordon B. Hinckley prayed “that this may become a holy site that the people of the world would want to come and see” (Grimes 2000). Hinckley was heavily involved in much of the decision-making, “down to the color of the carpets and the murals on the walls”

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24 Twenty-six temples were dedicated in the interim between the Palmyra Temple dedication and the Winter Quarters Temple dedication. None were broadcast to Church members outside the given temple’s “district.”
(Moore 2002). In April 2001, during an unannounced visit to check on the temple’s progress, Hinckley “hiked the temple from the basement to the top of the bell tower at ninety-two-years-old with cane in tow” (Huser 2002). The LDS Church spared no expense as it set out to resurrect one of the most enduring images of the Mormon past. Limestone, personally selected by President Hinckley, was brought up from Alabama, a bell was produced in The Netherlands, and hand-blown glass windows were produced in France. It took two and one half years to construct the Nauvoo Temple at an estimated cost of $30 million (Figure 12).

As construction on the Nauvoo Temple neared completion, Richard K. Sager, the President of the Nauvoo Mission, described the LDS response: “Ever since the prophet announced the rebuilding of the temple, it’s been the focal point of the Church” (Niebuhr 2001). When it was finally completed, over 350,000 people, representing every state and over seventy countries, toured the temple before its dedication.  

In the wake of the Palmyra and Winter Quarter dedications, few were surprised when the Church announced it would utilize its satellite network to broadcast the Nauvoo Temple dedication to LDS meetinghouses.  

With the erection of temples at Palmyra, Winter Quarters, and Nauvoo, President Hinckley literally imprinted these historical sites with sacrality. The presence of these temples will serve to reinforce for generations of Mormons to come the understanding that the places in which the Church’s history unfolded are sacred places, and that they, as Mormons, are tied to them.

There is much evidence to suggest that Mormons considered their historical sites throughout much of the twentieth century as just that: historical sites. Since 1995, however, an emphasis on the inherent sacrality of Mormon historical sites has become increasingly evident. But why?

RATIONALE

Gordon B. Hinckley, when asked to identify the greatest challenge facing the LDS Church, has consistently replied, “Growth.” At the dawning of the twenty-first century, many Western and Utah Mormons are still the offspring of nineteenth-century “pioneer” progenitors. Most Latter-day Saints, however, are not. Indeed, the majority of Mormons

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25 Over a million and a half people visited Nauvoo in 2002 (Fooken 2003).
26 Eight temples were dedicated in the interim between the Winter Quarter’s dedication and the Nauvoo dedication, but none of these were broadcast to an audience outside the proximate area.
27 Once again, President Hinckley selected a highly significant date on which to dedicate the Nauvoo Temple. June 27 marks the anniversary of Joseph Smith’s murder in nearby Carthage, Illinois. Hinckley even directed that the first dedicatory session correspond to the exact time of the Church founder’s death.
are first generation converts (Stark 1994, 14). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claims a membership of over twelve million, with a slim majority living outside the United States (as of July 2005). Over 100 million copies of the Book of Mormon, printed in over 100 languages, have been distributed. From 1991 to 2001 LDS Church membership increased by forty-nine percent (Hallett 2002). Currently between 250,000 and 300,000 new converts join the Church annually. In 2002 the LDS Church became the fifth largest religious denomination in the United States. This startling growth has prompted sociologist Rodney Stark to declare that the Mormons “stand on the threshold of becoming the first major faith to appear on the earth since the Prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert” (Stark 1984, 18).

Latter-day Saints at the close of the twentieth century share very little in common with each other except for their theological beliefs. According to Armand Mauss, some LDS Church leaders have become “concerned with the consequences of a muted Mormon identity” and that segment of Church leadership “seems increasingly to have gained ascendancy during the most recent generation of Mormons” (Mauss 1994, 79). A heritage-based sense of identity traditionally characterized the membership profile of the LDS Church. Gordon B. Hinckley and others within the LDS Church hierarchy now seem intent on utilizing the actual spaces in which Mormon history occurred to further promote this sense of identity among an increasingly disparate membership. The Mormon leadership’s role in this process cannot be overstated. Chidester and Linenthal insist that, “power is asserted and resisted in any production of space, and especially in the production of sacred space” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 15). For many Mormons the officially sanctioned history of the Church represents a vital element of their faith. Many of these same Mormons accept and revere their leadership hierarchy as God’s divinely-inspired representatives, and they attach great significance to the messages that emanate from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, thus facilitating the verbal sanctification of space.

David Lowenthal recognized our “inescapable dependence on the past,” and its potential influence in our lives (Lowenthal 1994, 43). Our heritage “distills the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own, earlier selves, and with our promised successors” (Lowenthal 1994, 43). The LDS Church has, since its inception, celebrated the events associated with its origins and early development. Attachment to the past can be magnified via “geographical memory,” which may enhance “a sense of shared history and experience” by attaching historical events to actual places (Hague and Mercer 1998, 326). Since 1995 the LDS Church hierarchy has increasingly nurtured the geographical memory of its worldwide membership by emphasizing and promoting its historical sites.

Mormon historical sites also provide the perfect staging ground for sacralizing efforts. They are, after all, historical sites, ripe for the construction of meanings that

28 In this article I have focused on the efforts of the LDS Church hierarchy to imbue space with meaning. In my research I have only touched anecdotally on the rank-and-file response. The Church’s efforts to orchestrate the sanctification of its historic geography undoubtedly go unnoticed, unheeded, or unfelt by many Mormons. Some may simply not respond to these top-down directed efforts. Others, particularly those who have a family history directly connected to these places may have their own, uniquely personal regard for the sites. New converts, however, who in many cases face a jarring transition from non-Mormon to Mormon life, may be most responsive to the Church hierarchy’s efforts to consecrate space and anchor the membership to a sacred historical geography.
influence historical memory and, therefore, identity. At the same time, though, they are spiritually and theologically significant, thus magnifying their potential impact on group identity. They serve to not only connect Church members worldwide to a shared history, but as sacred space, to a shared theology and worldview as well. Place does matter in the establishment and maintenance of a Mormon identity tied to the past, perhaps even more so for those Church members who have no familial link to that past.29

By merging the historical with the spiritual, the LDS hierarchy is transforming its heretofore mundane historical properties into Allan Pred’s description of “symbolically-laden, meaning-filled, ideology-projecting” sites (Pred 1990, 10). More and more these emerging sacred spaces, as Friedland and Hecht would put it, “undergird identities” and “galvanize the deepest emotions and attachments” (Friedland and Hecht 1991, 23). Certain previously unremarkable places in North America are increasingly becoming the focal points of a more geographically-based Mormon identity.

Officials at Church headquarters and historical site missionaries shared numerous examples of Latter-day Saints – particularly non-Americans – who came to Mormon historical sites and, in the course of their visit, expressed in one form or another the sentiment: “I now feel that this is my history.” LDS Church leaders evidently feel that the Church needs more than just theology and history to maintain cohesion and unity, it needs a geography as well; sacred space that all Mormons – whether in Utah or Uganda – can feel a part of, thus rooting the religion in place.

CONCLUSIONS

This is essentially a case study about how an institutional hierarchy can imbue space with meaning and thereby influence a collective sense of identity. It also provides insight into the process of site sanctification. The LDS hierarchy is imbuing what were heretofore primarily historical points of interest with sacrality, and the various means by which they have engineered this transformation are unique. Several recent studies have examined the manner in which certain locales have been imbued with sacrality (see, for example, Glass 1994; Smith and David 1995; Greene 1997; Hahn 1997, Bilu 1998; Smith 1998). But this study presents an example of these processes on a much larger scale. The construction of a sacred Mormon geography directly impacts millions of people. Within the next century, the actions described herein will likely influence tens and perhaps even hundreds of millions of people. The sacred spaces of Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, and other major religions emerged in the distant past. But this research chronicles the modern-day evolution of sacred space by what appears destined to become a major world religion.

Although the transformation from secular to sacred may entail actual changes to the landscape – e.g. costly Mormon temples and historical restorations – it is also very much related to the discourses that surround a given site. As a religious institutional

29 Phillip L. Barlow, in describing the development of Mormonism, notes that during the twentieth century the LDS Church placed less emphasis on some of its more peculiar tenets, including its emphasis on specific places. “Sacred space,” writes Barlow, “shrank from a broad and present kingdom to temple, church, home, and symbol” (Barlow 1999, 147). Throughout the twentieth century the LDS Church downplayed the spiritual significance of the sites associated with its sacred past (and future). However, I maintain that this trend has been reversed, and sacred space, at the behest of the hierarchy, is now emerging within the historical geography of Mormonism.
hierarchy, the LDS Church leadership not only has the ability to interpret and broadcast its version of history, it also controls its historical geography and has the ability to ascribe sacrality to it by controlling the messages that are there presented. Indeed, efforts to sacralize space through literal constructions are efficacious only in the degree to which they are accompanied by cultural constructions of meaning. Individual responses to these top-down directed efforts may vary, but the LDS Church, as an institutional hierarchy, possesses the power to greatly influence and shape the meanings that its adherents ascribe to these places.

This case study also provides interesting insights into aspects of scale. The LDS Church provides a prime example of how an institutional hierarchy can utilize technology to at once both maintain its hierarchical control and reinforce a collective sense of identity on a grand scale among a geographically dispersed membership. The Nauvoo Temple dedication, for example, was a global event, and yet at the same time it was private and intimate. It simultaneously united a far-flung, geographically and culturally disparate nation in an identity shaping ceremony that focused everyone’s collective attention on a highly significant place. This event, which transcended space, was nevertheless very much about place.30

Finally, this study illuminates an interesting relationship between secular and sacred history. Whereas a secular history – rooted in place – may contribute to a group’s collective sense of identity, a sacred history – rooted in sacred space – has the potential to greatly enhance group cohesion and identity by virtue of its religious significance, which weds past, present, and future into something quite seamless. In Mormonism, for example, history is not detached from people’s everyday lives. As a sacred heritage, it is bound up in their very identity. Similarly, the places in which this history occurred are not mere locations full of past significance; they are increasingly sacred places, reinforcing in the present the religious identity of its adherents. Some scholars suggest that Judaism’s collective identity, once focused on historical events, is now tied up more intimately in the land itself (Kedar and Werblowsky 1998, 12). This same reorientation from historical narrative to contemporary geography is currently underway within Mormonism.

REFERENCES


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30 The technology described above – in addition to other inevitable advances in telecommunications – offer institutional hierarchies myriad possibilities for the promotion and maintenance of ideology, nationalism, collective memory, and identity. These technologies enable institutional hierarchies, including religions, to transcend traditional constraints of time and space.


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People have wondered about religion. People have theorized about religion. In the process of wondering and theorizing, people have created a forest of ideas about religious beliefs and practices in particular cultural, social, and historical contexts. In *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Thomas Tweed wonders about religion by wandering through the forest of theories. He serves as a guide through the brush and above the canopy and below the earth. Along the way, Tweed is always mindful of the multiplicity and usefulness of theories, as well as the complementary construction of theories within a shared laboratory of religious studies. He is also interested in fashioning his own theory of religion, one that emphasizes the geographical dimensions of religions over time and space. In the end, after synthesizing hundreds of theories and substantiating his claims with dozens of examples from a plethora of religious traditions, Tweed basically wants two things: to bring his fellow forest-dwellers in contact with the limitations and boundaries of their theories of religion, and to cross those boundaries by representing religion in place (dwelling) and in movement (crossing).

Taking a cue from James Clifford, Tweed describes theories as itineraries and scholars as travelers. He then elaborates on two ways to understand theories. First, theories are “embodied travels” (9). They are non-linear movements of objects or persons across space and time. Tweed employs the ideas of the cultural geographers Edward Soja, Bruno Bosteel, and Sam Gill, as well as the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, to discredit static renderings of territories and maps, and instead to highlight both the purposeful and wandering aspects of travel. Second, theories are “positioned representations” (13). They are “sightings from sites” of an ever-shifting terrain by an ever-moving mapmaker (13). Here, Tweed pauses to remind scholars of blind spots. Since the terrain is changing, and since the observer is moving, and since no one position is the same as another, no scholar can possibly observe religions and religious people from all angles. The inability to be everywhere and see everything, however, does not mean that scholars should stop meandering toward truth. Rather, with the help of Richard Rorty, Donna Haraway, and Hilary Putnam, Tweed proposes that scholars accept the fact that their interpretations are always fallible and always contingent upon professional standards. Scholars are always standing somewhere, coming from somewhere, and going somewhere with their interpretations. As long as scholars at least try to know where they are situated, Tweed believes that checks can be applied to the potential power of interpretation.

Tweed devotes the middle section of his book to the subject of theoretical boundaries and confluences. When Tweed says that there are boundaries to theories of religion, he means that scholars employ “constitutive terms” and “orienting tropes” to define religion (29). He argues that scholars must accept the fact that they are responsible for definitional accuracy. Scholars must participate in what David Livingstone calls “exegetical fussiness” and what Jonathan Z. Smith considers a necessary, collective process of defining the concept of religion (32-33). Tweed finds metaphor to be a particularly useful trope when trying to define religion, mainly because it works as a prompt for new ways of seeing religion. All of this exegetical fussiness
leads Tweed to bring all that he admits to know about religion into a single definition. He writes, “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (54). The next twenty-four pages constitute a detailed analysis of each part of the definition. First, there is no such thing as religion-in-general; there is a multiplicity of religions which spans time and space. Second, using spatial and aquatic metaphors, Tweed suggests that religions emerge when there is a confluence of organic and cultural flows that then takes a swirling, transfluvial motion. These organic-cultural flows produce biological (individual, neurological) constraints and cultural (social, collective) mediations. From these flowing motions, religions establish feeling rules for the emotions of joy and suffering, as well as the possibility for relationships with both human and suprahuman powers. And lastly, Tweed insists that religions are spatial practices which allow for religious persons to make homes (dwelling) and cross boundaries (crossing).

Dwelling, according to Tweed, is about “the kinetics of homemaking” (80). It involves an active process of mapping, building, and inhabiting a space over time. Tweed’s primary example of dwelling, one that he refers to throughout his book, is the Cuban Catholic exile community of Miami, Florida. This is not surprising considering the fact that he wrote a book on the subject in 1997, entitled Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami (Oxford University Press). Based on his ethnographic findings at the shrine, and based on dozens of other insightful journeys into the religious spaces of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians, and other religious people, Tweed goes into surprisingly lucid detail about the experience of dwelling. He refers to religions as clocks, both biological and cultural, and as compasses, both neural and cultural. As clocks, religions orient people according to temporal scales that make sense of the past, present, and future. As compasses, religions orient people in space according to individual perception, codes of emotion, and other cultural factors. Tweed takes a cognitive science approach to spatial orientation by distinguishing between “autocentric (self-centered) and allocentric (object-centered) spatial representations or reference frames” (93). As these temporal and spatial orientations intertwine, Tweed believes that religious people experience four types of spaces, or “what we might call four chronotopes: the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos” (97). The confluence of these four chronotopes allows scholars to see religions as geographies, as individual and collective attempts by religious people to find meaning in the world in which they live.

Yet no matter how hard religious people try to situate themselves in time and space, Tweed insists that religions are also about “the kinetics of itinerancy” (123). More precisely, religions generate “terrestrial crossings,” “corporeal crossings,” and “cosmic crossings” (123). First, religious people exit homes and homelands as they cross natural and social terrains. The experience of terrestrial crossing depends upon travel and communication technologies, as well as the intention of returning home, in the case of pilgrimages, or making a new home, in the case of missions and migrant communities. Terrestrial crossings also depend on the dispensation of power, as seen most evidently in compulsory or constrained migration and resultant social hierarchies. Second, as people cross time and space, they bring their bodies to the limits of self and the natural world. Tweed describes these corporeal crossings as “limit situations” where individuals confront the limits of their bodies during threshold moments and life cycle rituals, illnesses, and natural disasters (137). Third, religious people create teleographies, or representations of the ultimate horizon, which amount to “cartographies of desire” (151). Tweed identifies two types of cosmic crossings: transporting teleographies and transforming teleographies. Transporting traditions imagine horizons of the sacred “as a boundary between
this world and another world” (152), while transforming traditions imagine horizons of the sacred “as a personal or social limit” in this world (153). Transportation denotes a change in location (ascent, rebirth, encounter), while transformation denotes a change in condition (enlightenment, purification, reform). Using the theory of Bruno Latour, Tweed concludes that “[r]eligions move between what is imagined as the most distant horizon and what is imagined as the most intimate domain…. As itinerants, the religious never remain anywhere or anytime for long” (158).

So what are scholars to do with Tweed’s theory of religion? In the end, even Tweed seems to admit that he has raised more questions than answers in the course of writing Crossing and Dwelling. Such is the nature of a theory that “does not aim at explanation or prediction,” but rather takes a locative, pragmatic approach to the study of religion (165). And while his theory of religion seems to capture the cultural motions of transnational communities like Cuban Catholics in Miami, Tweed identifies at least three blind spots to his approach, three “places where sightings come to an end” (171). First, by using an aquatic metaphor to describe religions, scholars run the risk of being washed away in the transfluvial tugs and jolts of their own theories, thus casting shadows over cause-and-effect relationships. Second, Tweed still wonders how to understand “the transfluence of nature-culture,” how to ask questions at the hyphen between organic and cultural orientations (174). And third, between the theoretical motion of the scholar and the organic-cultural confluence of the religious, Tweed wonders how one can ever recover the agency of individuals. One might start, Tweed recommends, with religious specialists such as John Winthrop, Martin Luther King, and Mary Baker Eddy, people who “functioned as headwaters, the source and upper end of a religious stream” (176). Yet one might also remember what Victor Turner said of the anti-structuralist personalities of Saint Francis of Assisi and Caitanya of Bengal—what might appear at first to be a spontaneous community will ultimately find institutional cohesion and thus enter into what Tweed would call the organically constrained and culturally mediated waters of life (65).

A fourth concern can be added to Tweed’s admission of theoretical limitation, though it is less a matter of blindness and more a matter of clarity. Tweed’s theory of religion is at its clearest when related to transnational communities such as Cuban Catholics in Miami, which raises several other questions: Is this a theory of religion, or is this a theory of transnational religion? To put it another way, does Tweed’s theory of religion only apply to literal pilgrims (Muslims on the hajj), migrants (Polish Jews in German concentration camps), and missionaries (American Mormon men in Brazil), or does Tweed’s theory of religion make all religious persons into metaphorical pilgrims (suburban mothers shopping at neighborhood Christian bookstores), migrants (African children adopted by American parents), and missionaries (evangelical Protestants who wear crosses on their collars to work)? The literal application of Tweed’s theory relates to transnational religion, a form of religion with obvious evidence of dwelling and crossing. But Tweed is not satisfied with a strictly transnational approach to religion; he is making a much more sweeping argument about the everyday practice of crossing and dwelling even within deeply embedded communities like generations-old black Baptist churches in the South and Mormon communities in the Utah mountains. He is coming close to treating all religious persons, no matter how much they might feel at home, as if they were strangers in a strange land. The implications for such a categorical reorientation of the study of religion are many, which is why Tweed hopes that his theory “sparks more conversations and generates other accounts—even, or especially, accounts that challenge this one” (166).
All of this dwelling in and moving across space and time reiterates the importance of Tweed’s work to the geography of religions. Tweed is especially interested in understanding religion as it pertains to the “spatial turn” within the community of professional geographers (189, 198). As a complement to his spatial approach, Tweed wants his fellow theorists to take a reflexive position in both their research and teaching methods. He wants scholars to respect the translocative and transtemporal aspects of not only their religious subjects, but also themselves as they move from home, to school, to archives, and everywhere in between. Readers of Crossing and Dwelling can respect Tweed’s exhaustive footnotes, sensitivity to cultural diversity, and careful, logical, even entertaining expositions of his theory of religion. What started in 1993 at the shrine of Our Lady of Charity in Miami is now expanded and transformed into a truly magnificent example of collegiality, determination, and scholarship, all meant to leave scholars wondering and wandering.

Michael Pasquier, Florida State University
Those keeping up with the growing body of literature on women and gender in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) will find the essays collected in this volume a refreshing break from traditional approaches. Written and edited by scholars working within various subfields of geography, this work aims to present “specifically geographical perspectives on the experiences of Muslim women” (4). That is, unlike much of the current literature, these essays place notions of “space and place” at the heart of their analyses. The title and the introduction to the volume also promise analyses that “explore the ways in which religious beliefs, institutions, practices, and discourses” shape the spatial experiences of women in the MENA (13). Yet, as we will see below, the collection as a whole fails to deliver on this promise.

The book is divided into three parts, beginning with a section entitled, “Gender, Development, and Religion” (17). Broadly speaking, the four essays in this portion of the text argue that globalization and western development initiatives have contributed to significant shifts in the spatial experiences of women in the MENA. Sarah Halvorson argues that the increasingly market-oriented economy of Northern Pakistan has forced young girls and women to take more responsibility for household work and local farming. This trend is then reinforced by an increasingly conservative religious discourse that limits the mobility of girls to private spaces. Noting a similar response to globalization in Eastern Morocco, Susanne Steinmann suggests that the increased responsibility of women in the home and on the farm provides greater spatial mobility for women by granting access to the previously restricted spaces of agricultural production.

Essays by Naheed Aaftaab and Diana Davis highlight the unintended consequences of western development initiatives that fail to attend to local norms governing gender and space. Drawing on fieldwork from Afghanistan, Aaftaab argues that liberal development theories which encourage the education of females by the state unintentionally create educational institutions that reinforce traditional gender roles. Also reporting from Afghanistan, Diana Davis notes that western-led development initiatives have denied women the opportunity to participate in projects for which they are well qualified on the basis of inaccurate assumptions about norms governing women’s mobility in these communities.

The second section of the text, entitled “Geographies of Mobility” (125), includes three essays that explore the spatial experiences of women migrants from the MENA insofar as they intersect with cultural and religious norms governing mobility. In what is perhaps the best essay of the volume, Rachel Silvey explores the multivalent influence of Islam on the mobility experiences of Indonesian women migrants in Saudi Arabia. Turning to the discourses of Moroccan women migrants in France, Amy Freeman argues that the constructed “moral geographies” of Moroccan culture help us to understand the mobility experience of Moroccan women and their consequent conceptions of freedom. Finally, Robina Mohammad argues that Pakistani women migrants in Britain are the victims of a “conservative, radical, religious nationalism” that “legitimizes the imposition of physical and
spatial constraints” on women in the name of preserving the collective identity of the migrant community (196).

The third and final section of this volume is entitled “Discourse, Representation, and the Contestation of Space” (201). The five essays that make up this portion of the text do not hang together as well as the essays within the previous groupings. The first three essays chronicle the way in which women from the MENA have contested traditional limits on their spatial mobility, while the last two essays interpret and critique the textual and visual representation of these women within literary and print media.

Anna Secor describes the competing discourses of democracy and Islamism in modern day Turkey and argues that veiling, as an “embodied spatial practice,” has become a “site of politics” in this context (204). Abdi Samatar turns our attention to a remarkable community of women in Northern Somalia who contested traditional norms governing gender and space by building a women’s mosque. Likewise, Malek Abisaab chronicles the ways in which a group of Lebanese workingwomen contested traditional norms governing female mobility through labor strikes and protests.

In the penultimate essay of this volume, Marc Brosseau and Leila Ayari engage in a “cultural and geographical interpretation” of contemporary French novels written by Tunisian women, focusing on the literary representation of gender, space, and place. Ghazi-Walid Falah then ends the book with an examination of the visual representation of women from the MENA in the print media of the United States. She argues that the images selected reinforce stereotypes of Muslim women as either passive victims without normal experiences or active and irrationally violent political agents.

The essays collected in this volume contribute a great deal to the contemporary scholarship on gender in the Middle East and North Africa. One need not be well versed in contemporary geographical theory to realize that analyses of “space and place” are particularly relevant additions to this scholarship. When gender norms are constructed and reinforced by spatial segregation, as is the case in much of the MENA, the geographical analyses presented in these essays are of central importance. Readers will also benefit from the careful fieldwork of many of the authors. Of particular note are the essays of Davis, Steinmann, and Abisaab which reveal that there are important disconnects between official discourse on women’s role in “public” (as opposed to “private”) spaces and the actual empirical realities. The data collected in these essays can also contribute to contemporary discussions about the relationship between collective identity formation and the spatial restrictions placed on women and their bodies.

Despite these strengths, this text may be a disappointment to those (myself included) who are interested in understanding the specific function of religion in the construction and experience of gendered space in the MENA. With the notable exception of Rachel Silvey’s work, the essays in this volume give scant attention to the complicated role Islamic discourse plays in shaping the religious identities and spatial experiences of women in the MENA. If Islam is mentioned, it is only as a monolithic force that mysteriously imposes norms of space and place on women who have no personal connection to that force. Falah and Nagel are absolutely right to warn against reducing the experiences of these women to religious experience alone. Yet, some of these essays stumble into the opposite problem of collapsing the significant religious experiences of these women into their experiences of social, political, and cultural norms.
These criticisms should not detract from the overall value of the book as a resource for those interested in the relationship between gender and space in the MENA. It simply suggests that a more appropriate title might have been, *Geographies of Women in the Middle East and North Africa*. Readers looking for a further analysis of the intersections between “gender, religion, and space”, will have to wait for another volume.

*Elizabeth A. Barre, Florida State University*
Geographies of Religions and Beliefs Systems publishes articles with diverse topical foci, variable epistemological, theoretical, and methodological approaches, and a range of researchers, from accomplished senior scholars to those in early career stages. Hence, the following four types of articles will be considered for publication:

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