

*Review Symposium on American Religion*

## **Interpreting the “Popular” in Popular Religion**

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American Studies analyzes a society in which more than half of the people attend church regularly. Political speeches invoke God’s blessings; celebrities attribute their success to divine help; and popular musicians routinely use words like heaven, sin, and prayer. Pat Robertson owns the fifth-largest television network, is a major force in the Republican Party, and has seriously claimed that George Bush was complicit in a Satanic conspiracy to institute “an occult-inspired world socialist dictatorship.”<sup>1</sup> Two of the greatest leaders of the postwar African-American freedom movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, were ministers. Thirty-two percent of citizens say that they are “born-again”; 62 percent have “no doubt” that Jesus will return; and 85 percent accept the Bible as divinely inspired.<sup>2</sup> How high do these numbers have to rise before our field treats popular religion as an integral part of United States popular culture? As a scholar trained in both United States religion and American Studies, I have long been dismayed by the existential and methodological gulfs between these two fields. Religion, especially contemporary religion, is among the most understudied topics in American Studies, compared to its weight in the larger culture.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, despite some important exceptions, academic specialists in religion often lag behind the leading voices in the interdisciplinary study of cultural pluralism, popular culture,

and cultural theory. I believe that bridging these gaps should be a high priority.

R. Laurence Moore's *Selling God* and Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's *Churching of America* help address this challenge. They approach religions in the same terms as other traditions and subcultures, without the special pleading based on confessionalism or revelation that sometimes bogs down discussions in religion, enraging secular scholars. They frame their questions within wider debates in sociology and cultural history. Both start from the premise that religious disestablishment created a free market in culture, wherein successful religions were forced to compete in persuasiveness—in effect, to undersell both other religions and secular commercial amusements in a cultural marketplace. By analyzing the market offerings of religious leaders, they shed light on the growth and continuing strength of religious institutions and identities at the grassroots. From this promising starting point, Finke and Stark take us two steps forward and two steps back. Moore, however, takes us two solid steps forward with no serious missteps. This still leaves the conversation lagging slightly behind the most interesting work in cultural studies, but in a far stronger position to move forward.

Since both these books are studies of popular religion, I begin by distinguishing four ways that scholars in religion understand the word “popular”:

- (1) They sometimes mean practices that many ordinary people enjoy doing, such as attending church services as opposed to writing academic theology.
- (2) They sometimes mean “authentic” or “folk” practices—e.g. premodern hymns or traditional ethnic devotional practices, as opposed to contemporary commercial culture.
- (3) In contrast to sense two, they sometimes mean religious ideas circulated through commercial mass media—for example, prayers spoken on TV by famous basketball players, as opposed to private face-to-face prayers in their churches or locker rooms. (Televangelism is one example, but is less important than religious issues within “mainstream” programming.)
- (4) They sometimes use “popular religion” to describe religious dimensions of counter-hegemonic cultural

contestation by nonelites versus elites. Religion in this last sense could be “popular” even if practiced by a persecuted minority, and whether or not it is mass-mediated. The definition of such “popular religion” shifts with different definitions of “the hegemonic”; however, the political use of hymns by African American churches during the civil rights movement is one example.

These four senses interrelate. We might argue that no religion can be popular in sense one (widely practiced) unless it is popular in sense three (mass mediated) *and* unpopular in sense four (hegemonic). Or we could argue that it cannot be popular in sense four (counter-hegemonic) unless it is popular in sense two and unpopular in sense three (a folk practice uncorrupted by commodification). There are many possibilities—but using the term “popular religion” to cover all these meanings at the same time is not among them. One of my goals in this essay is to explore whether the last two kinds of popular religion—mass-mediated and counter-hegemonic—might sometimes overlap. Of course they do not always overlap, and when they do they may not be popular in sense one. However, asking how they fit together (or stand in conflict) is interesting for two reasons: it is a relatively understudied topic and it is a promising place for dialogue between religious studies and cultural studies.

Finke and Stark mainly study popular religion in sense one, the demographically prevalent. They argue a point well-known by historians in United States religion, that the long-term trajectory of United States religious participation has been upward. Pat Robertson is misinformed when he laments, as are secularists when they celebrate, a decline in religious commitment since the days of “old time religion.” The actual percentage of religious membership increased from 15-20 percent in the colonial era to around 60 percent in recent years.

Finke and Stark’s first step forward is in quantifying these demographics. They estimate church members from the number of seats in existing churches, testing their projections against census reports by clergy—reports that have been hard to standardize or use by themselves because they use variable definitions of membership and are sometimes distorted. (One article on colonial Anglicans based on clerical reports to a bishop in London estimated six times as many church members as available seats in their buildings.) Finke and Stark present their findings effectively, using graphs and photos. Most often they document commonplaces such as the low numbers of colonial church members, strong Baptist and Methodist growth in the 1800s, and the greater success of evangelicals compared to

liberal Protestants in the twentieth century. Sometimes they make fresh revisions in received wisdom. For example, standard texts have claimed that Roman Catholics became the nation's largest denomination by 1850. Finke and Stark revise their numbers, first, by subtracting people from "Catholic countries" like Ireland whom they judge "nominal" or who were actually members of a Protestant minority and, second, by counting Protestant and Catholic children using the same system (e.g., not ignoring Baptist children before they become baptized members, while counting Catholic children who were baptized as infants.) This reduces the estimate of active Catholics from 3.5 to 1.1 million and means that Catholics did not actually outgrow Methodists until 1890. Moreover, inflated estimates caused Catholic leaders to worry about "defecting" people who never should have been counted in the first place. Finke and Stark's data also show that Catholics were not necessarily concentrated in eastern cities like Boston; in 1860 the largest percentages were in Rhode Island, California, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

Finke and Stark undermine this solid step forward by failing to engage the existing historical literature at its strongest. "We did not intend to make major revisions in the history of American religion," they say, but "we have done precisely that" (1). Unfortunately, it turns out that they revise only "general historians of American religion" (2), ignoring several of the more pluralistic and/or demographically sophisticated surveys and dozens of specialized studies, including an explicit historical critique of Stark.<sup>4</sup> Finke and Stark accuse general historians of overstressing top-down interpretations of mainline Protestants, a common complaint for two decades. One feels sorry for them when they claim to pioneer the ideas that pluralism created conditions for religious growth, or that Baptist, Holiness, and Pentecostal groups grew faster than the old mainline. This has been old hat for a long time, and any lingering doubt that the field has emphasized it was dispelled, at the very latest, by Moore's 1986 *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*.<sup>5</sup>

The ideas Finke and Stark attack do retain some influence in history, in popular Christian literature, and (the unacknowledged key to their argument?) among sociologists committed to secularization theory. In these contexts their book is valuable. Indeed, their belated sense of mission gives their writing an appealing verve and energy. For instance, both books under review discuss how radio and television networks provided free air time to the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), then withdrew the privilege in 1960—after which evangelical broadcasters swept the field since they had already learned to pay their own way. While Moore blandly reports that the FCC "acted as a media trade-association group" (246) and lingers over the ironies of its position, Finke and Stark blast the FCC as a "cartel" with an unambiguous stench of hypocrisy, illusion, and

failure (218-223). Unfortunately, Finke and Stark's self-assurance sometimes shades into over-confidence and a tendency to make unwarranted assumptions about the power of selected anecdotes. For example, they speak of the "immense respect in which American Catholics held their priests" in earlier years, in contrast to the current situation which they attribute to Vatican II. I consulted their footnote supporting this claim, wondering first how it fits the mixed evidence in studies like Robert Orsi's *Madonna of 115th St.* and, second, whether evidence of decline would have been greater or smaller *without* Vatican II.<sup>6</sup> Rather than addressing either question, they merely mention a 1944 Bing Crosby film that was so pro-church that it made a group of priests "too moved to speak" (295-296).

Church membership statistics need interpretation. Moore pointed this out in response to Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, which covers much of the same ground as Finke and Stark. Only 17 percent of taxpayers in Salem at the time of the witch trials claimed church membership, but "are we truly to think that Salem in 1683 was anything other than a Christian culture? If it wasn't, then whatever in the world ever was?" Of course we must understand how church membership increased among later generations of Anglo-Americans—but not forget that these later generations "did not have to learn Christian practices in the same way that African Americans had to learn those things."<sup>7</sup> It may be that the 17 percent figure understates the impact of religion in Salem and the 60 percent figure overstates it for recent years. Some scholars have found growth in "mental members" of churches, those who show up in national surveys but not church records. For example, the raw numbers of people who claimed to be Episcopalians increased by 20 percent from the 1960s to 1980s, but the church records show a 25 percent decrease in active members.<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to interpretation, Finke and Stark again move one step forward and one step back. They base their analysis on the distinction between churches and sects, basically reworking Dean Kelly's influential thesis of 1972 using business metaphors.<sup>9</sup> Unlike churches that cast a wider net and have lower group boundaries, sects are smaller and more pugnacious, with higher boundaries. Finke and Stark argue that sects are more dynamic, but become complacent with age and vulnerable to competition from new sects. Finke and Stark hypothesize that rational "shoppers" in the religious market should invest in sects, even though churches sell higher prestige at cheaper prices. Since sects are more demanding, their members provide greater rewards for each other. But high commitments must be motivated by "otherworldliness," which Finke and Stark define in terms of embattlement, rather than accommodation, with respect to the dominant culture. Sects have "a high degree of tension" with "their

sociocultural environment" (40, 169). Finke and Stark link this "otherworldliness" to belief in miracles and to clergy with low education and pay. Their conclusions will gratify neo-conservatives: liberal Christians are intellectual and political losers; conservatives are winners. Apparently, in this land of Nixon and Reagan, conservatives move against the grain of the dominant culture.

This analysis implies a notion of the "world" against which sects are "other." By positing this "world" Finke and Stark construct the same hegemonic center that they claim to deconstruct, but an even greater problem is selective definition of this "center." They present "upstart sects" as outsiders based on these sects' self-understood resistance to certain aspects of modern thought and liberal social policy. This generalization holds only if analysts screen out these groups' harmony with other major aspects of dominant culture such as the bourgeois heterosexual family, patriotic nationalism, consumer capitalism, individualism.<sup>10</sup> For Finke and Stark such things remain in the shadows, and what shines in the light of analysis seems arbitrary. For example, they accent the lower social distance between uneducated laity and Methodist circuit riders, presenting this as a tension between Methodists and their environment; but later, they associate the *greater* distance between Catholic priests and laity before Vatican II with the same "tension." They stress how Catholics helped shape the institutional fabric of ethnic communities: perhaps this is "otherworldliness" and "tension with the environment," but "worldliness" and "constitution of the environment" makes equal sense.

Finke and Stark's theory seems to imply that what I call popular religion four (counter-hegemonic) produces popular religion one (demographic success). Is this true? Do all forms of accommodation lead to weakness and failure? Finke and Stark concede limits to their hypothesis that religions succeed if they demand sacrifice. Apparently some forms of sacrifice really are sacrificial and some ways of challenging power lead to actual loss of popularity. But this would be sacrifice for losers, and it rarely peeks through the cracks in this book. Finke and Stark are interested in sacrifice for winners, which is more like accepting a housing code required to buy a house in an exclusive neighborhood. Catholic teaching on contraception clearly represents "tension with the environment" but since it alienates people, they barely mention it. They do not ask whether Catholic teachings against unemployment and militarism represent tension with the environment and an opportunity for success.

Applied to mainline churches, Finke and Stark's theories suggest that prudent managers should promote stronger counter-hegemonic commitments. I believe this is good advice on many issues, but would it lead to success across the board? Certainly this hypothesis would not have predicted the "winners and losers" in the religious competition for corporate

funding in recent years. Finke and Stark might advance this discussion if they explored what forms of “tension” produce “winners” and which forms produce “losers.” Consider a recent study of baby boomers who were confirmed as Presbyterians in the 1960s. Half remain church members today (40 percent in mainline congregations); the other half have drifted into an apathetic and noncommittal stance (40 percent) or outright secularism (8 percent). Only 6 percent became fundamentalists, despite the conventional wisdom about gains on the right at the expense of liberals. The leading trend among both members and defectors was “lay liberalism,” an open and tolerant stance, especially toward individual freedom and sexual morality. The more liberal the boomer, the more likely he/she is to be bored or alienated. Even though this study supports Finke and Stark’s contention that boundary-maintenance is crucial, its data seems to suggest that stronger boundaries, especially ones based on conservative gender politics, would *accelerate* defections.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately this sort of nuance is lacking in Finke and Stark’s self-assured analysis. For them, meatless Fridays signify strong boundaries, otherworldliness, and “winning.” Seminaries that address feminism signify compromise with the dominant culture, secularization, and “losing.” Camp meetings that involve reunions, courtship, and theatrical techniques—both books call them “mammoth picnics”—are otherworldly. So are Christian bookstores, beauty queens, and football players. Such selective definitions erase most of the value in Finke and Stark’s interpretive model. Despite their statistical contributions, I advise readers interested in these issues to consult Moore’s *Religious Outsiders* and Butler’s *Awash in a Sea of Faith*.

Turning to Moore’s *Selling God*, we shift from studying popular religion in sense number one (the prevalent) to sense number three (the mass-mediated). Much of Moore’s argument is condensed in Mark Twain’s comment of 1871: Americans “no longer got their religion from the ‘drowsy pulpit.’ Christianity came ‘filtered down’ through plays and the ‘despised novel’” (147). If religion was to succeed in the open market created by disestablishment, it had to be packaged to outsell other kinds of religion as well as secular entertainment. Protestant clergy were aware of this dynamic and responded in innovative and aggressive ways. They made their offerings less “drowsy”—e.g., through trashy novels with religious morals, “saloon substitutes,” the entertainment functions of Chautauquas, and religious theme parks. And they tried to shape the form of their secular competition—e.g., through reform of the theater, cooperating with pioneering forms of “family entertainment” like P.T. Barnum’s, and attempting to police the morals of Hollywood.

Moore enjoys choosing examples that tweak common wisdom. He compares critics of Scientology and Methodist revivalism. After describing critics who attacked revivals for their low intellectual quality, emotion-

alism, sexual energy, and anarchy, he says “it is hard to read through these accounts without thinking of modern rock concerts” (49). He quotes Jim Bakker: “We have a better product than soap or automobiles. We have eternal life.” Then he says that these words sound exactly like “church advertisement manuals sponsored by Social Gospel enthusiasts” and that televangelists simply “re-situate the Social Gospel on the political Right” (249-250). Moore also argues that religious controversies became “a kind of paid amusement” (120) and makes his point through amusing examples. Consider J.Z. Knight (Shirley MacLaine’s teacher), who was ordered to channel for Ramtha in a divorce court to determine whether Ramtha was “a god, a spirit, or a fake” (262). Moore discusses numerous “true tales” of sex and violence, as well as real-life scandals such as that of Bishop Benjamin Onkerdonk, who (as reported in the *Herald*, a New York newspaper) thrust his “hand of consecration” into the “bare bosom” of a parishioner as they rode in a carriage driven by her husband (132).

However, this book is far more than a set of snappy anecdotes. It is a major contribution to United States cultural history. Moore’s baseline analysis is that secularism (in the form of consumer capitalism) progressively defeated religion (defined with reference to transcendence and social criticism), and that the commercialization of Protestantism intensified this process. Recall Twain’s “drowsy pulpit” comment—Moore concurs that religion was “*filtered down*” through the process of commercialization. He implies that this filtering often made religion shallow and changed the primary cultural arenas from the pulpit to the theater, the seminary to the civil court, and so on. Moore can be harsh about this. He speaks of the “blame-reducing effect” of explaining commercialization by the iron laws of the market rather than the free choice of clerics. His point “is not quite to say”—apparently it is nearly to say—“that the market conquered religion, forcing religion to walk the streets, to make its spiritual mission a cash transaction, to surrender its power” to the secular (145-146). Moore denies that there is a “naked public square,” as neo-conservatives argue.<sup>12</sup> Rather the problem is that “religion is everywhere” but it “has become an ordinary commodity. . . Jim Bakker is Velveeta; Norman Vincent Peale is sliced Swiss in plastic wrap; Reinhold Niebuhr is Brie” (256).

At the same time, Moore stresses that such popularized religion represents a sort of success. Religion *did* filter down and in the process it filled “drowsy pulpits” and influenced the “despised novels.” He argues that this outcome was the best possible tradeoff from the perspective of Protestant leaders, constituting a major explanation for the prevalence of religion in United States culture. Moore presents his protagonists as creative innovators in United States cultural history who had important successes in pursuing their agendas. Far from being cheesy imitations of secular culture (the role that “Christian rock” plays in relation to rock)



they were often “major inventors of American popular commercial culture,” especially during the nineteenth century. (92) Their actions affected wider popular tastes and the larger shape of the market. “If what people call the spiritual is to have any worldly or public importance, it has to be recognizable in something tangible” in the marketplace of culture. Without popularization “we might not be talking about spirit at all these days” (145-146). Moore shows that antebellum denominations and political parties developed in parallel and mutually reinforcing ways; then he notes that many contemporary citizens describe religion—and few describe politics—as central to their lives. “Those who have wanted a politics without religion may get their wish,” he concludes, “but at the cost of a politics without parties or voters” (89).

In the end, Moore does not present his protagonists’ cup as either half-empty or half-full, but three-quarters empty. However, the upshot of his nuanced analysis, and the great contribution of the book, is to unsettle the assumption that religion and secular popular culture are in a zero-sum competition. His argument raises crucial questions about the pragmatic possibilities for transmitting religious traditions within capitalism. It implies that we cannot understand U.S. popular culture without serious attention to religion.

Moore’s book will not be the last word on this subject. No book can do everything, and in this case the analysis is weighted heavily toward male Anglo-Protestant elites. In a revealing passage, Moore shifts in three sentences from discussing “religion” to “Protestants” to “religious leaders” (6). We need research on how these issues appear from other social locations. Also, Moore sometimes slips from a commendable focus on the commodified *dimensions* of religious activities, to the less defensible impression of *reducing* the religious developments he discusses to the dimension of commodification. This occasional reduction does not mean that Moore himself believes that religion can be so reduced; in fact, the problem is more nearly the opposite. Without theorizing in depth, he sometimes seems to presuppose that “real” religion and consumer culture are essentially opposed, even when his examples blur their distinctions. In this respect the book reads less as a bold new interpretation of religion taking popular forms, and more as the sort of jeremiad about the trivialization of religion that sells for a dime a dozen. Moore does say that almost all religions at all times have had commercial aspects; his argument about the United States case concerns the rising centrality of commercialization. Even so, at times he converges with scholarship that laments the erosion of popular religion in sense two (the “authentic”). He is of two minds about the idea that, within a culture organized through pervasive commodification, religion would logically be articulated through such forms, so that the most interesting questions shift. The issue is no

longer “Commodification or not?” but rather “Why this *kind* of commodification and not that kind?”

This leads to my final reservation. Moore does not select the strongest examples of commodified religion(s) that advance the moral agendas he supports—agendas suggested by his respect for Reinhold Niebuhr’s socialism of the 1930s and his parting thought that commodification leaves us “with nothing new under an unforgiving sun whose burning rays carry cancer... through an ozone-depleted atmosphere” (276). He is too quick to homogenize popular religions. His treatments of the African-American prophetic tradition and white populism are severely truncated, his gender analysis is limited, and he downplays the oppositional potential of urban working-class religion. He does describe contestation between middle-class and working-class forms of leisure. He portrays workers winning significant compromises, but he presupposes their inevitable defeat and suggests (citing Theodor Adorno) that they bought “the cultural equivalent of a mess of pottage” (200). Insofar as United States religions have moved inside the horizon of commodity culture, as Moore persuasively argues, exploring their moral-political differences is imperative. Moore is not fully engaged in such exploration; we need more studies of how struggles for social justice can take place in and through popular culture. It is enough for one book, however, to advance the scholarly discussion as much as this one does.

At the outset I suggested four meanings of popular religion, and throughout this essay I have been trying to call one combination of these meanings into the spotlight, from a place where other meanings often overshadow it. This is sense four (counterhegemonic) within the horizon of sense three (mass-mediated). Both Finke and Stark and Moore advance this discussion, even though neither focuses on it. Finke and Stark illuminate popular religion one (the prevalent) and show that *considering* oneself counter-hegemonic can be a winning rhetoric if “opposition” makes minimal demands and supports bourgeois values. Moore focuses on the terrain where popular religion three meets popular religion one. I suggest further work that builds on Moore’s analysis, but shifts greater attention to places *within* popular religion three where forms of popular religion four thrive. Then we can explore how oppositional popular religions *interact* with demographically widespread popular religions—either overlapping with them or contesting them in specific contexts and fields of power.

## Notes

1. Pat Robertson, *The New World Order* (Dallas, 1991), 92, 174-176; Janice Peck, *The Gods of Televangelism: the Crisis of Meaning and the Appeal of Religious Television* (Cresskill, N.J., 1993), 129-134. See also Michael Lind, “Rev. Robertson’s Grand Interna-

tional Conspiracy Theory," *New York Review of Books* (February 2, 1995), 21-25 and "The Death of Intellectual Conservatism" *Dissent* (Winter 1995), 42-47.

2. Figures cited by Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), 2-3 and 13-15, from polls in the 1980s. See George Gallup and Jim Castelli, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's* (New York, 1989). The 85 percent figure includes about half who defend literal inerrancy and half who gave some scope for symbolic interpretation. These beliefs were somewhat stronger among less educated people and southerners, but the numbers are significant throughout all regions and educational levels.

3. On the relative neglect of religion by twentieth-century historians, see James Lorence and James Grinsel, "Amen: the Role of Religion in History Teaching," *AHA Perspectives* (October, 1992), 20-23.

4. These general histories reduce mainly to three survey texts published between 1972 and 1984: Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972); Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1981); and Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (New York, 1984.) Finke and Stark also lean on a 1976 article by Douglas Sweet criticizing earlier historians such as William Warren Sweet and Robert Baird. Important general studies not listed in their bibliography include Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, 1981); Edwin Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York, 1962) and *A Religious History of America* (San Francisco, 1990) Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America* (Englewood Cliffs, 1980). David Hackett, "Rodney Stark and the Sociology of American Religious History," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29: 3 (1990), 372-376 raises several of the issues I address below; this paper was read in Stark's presence three years before the book appeared.

5. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York, 1986).

6. Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street* (New Haven, 1985). This study unsettles their analysis by documenting a thriving Catholic identity largely detached from attending worship or respecting priests.

7. R. Laurence Moore, "American Religion as Popular Culture," *Religious Studies Review* 18: 3 (1992), 192; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, 1990).

8. Kirk Hadaway, "Denomination Defection: Recent Research on Religious Disaffiliation in America," in *The Mainstream Protestant "Decline,"* ed. Milton Coalter, John Mulder, and Louis Weeks (Louisville, 1990), 102.

9. Dean Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (New York, 1972). Finke and Stark fail to address major texts on these issues, notably Robert S. Michaelson and Wade Clark Roof, eds., *Liberal Protestantism: Realities and Possibilities* (New York, 1986) and William Hutchison, *Between the Times: the Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America* (New York, 1989). For additional discussion and bibliography, see my "Evangelical Popular Religion as a Source for North American Liberation Theology: Insights from Postmodern Popular Culture Theory," *American Studies* 31: 1 (Spring 1992), 63-82.

10. For more on these points see Hackett, "Rodney Stark and the Sociology of American Religious History"; Moore, *Religious Outsiders*"; and Hulsether, "Evangelical Popular Religion."

11. Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: the Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville, 1994). The authors present two options for the mainline churches: "recapture authority" (as Finke and Stark would emphatically recommend) or adapt to the desires of lay liberals. They lean toward moderate versions of the former approach because they see the key cause of defection as eroding boundaries of belief, fed by weak "plausibility structures" in local congregations and relativism in the wider culture. They fear that accepting these trends would only increase the mainline's problems in the long run. If so, their data suggests that the mainline is between a rock and a hard place.

12. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1984).