

Chapter One

Denominations Grow as Individuals Join Congregations

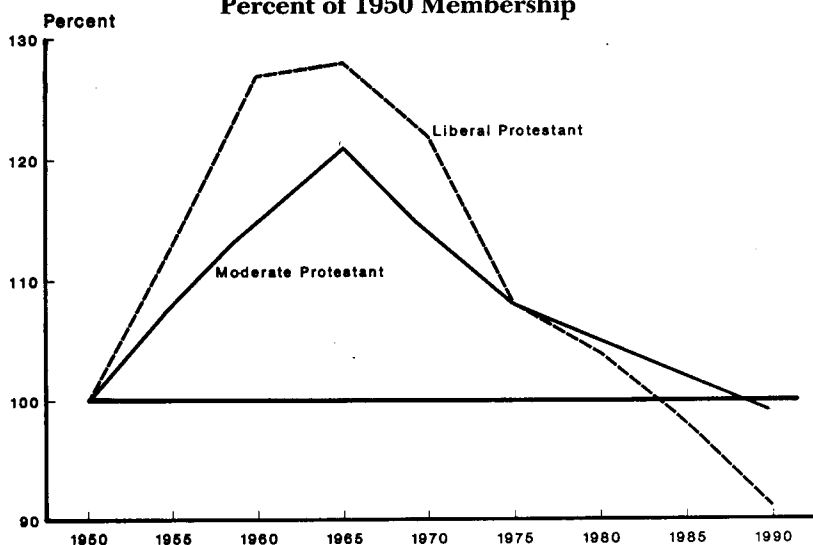
David A. Roozen

*A seismic shift has been occurring and
continues in American religion.*
Martin Marty, 1979

Seismic shifts rarely catch public attention except at the most dramatic moments of disjuncture. For American denominational religion that initial jolt into consciousness came in 1965 when the membership trends of most “mainline” Protestant denominations turned from growth to decline. Yet unlike the immediate awareness and response typically related to an earthquake, it was not until the mid-1970s that the mainline decline was widely accepted as a serious “new” reality that demanded attention. And it was not until 1979 that the first comprehensive collection of research on the decline was published: *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950–1978* (Hoge and Roozen).

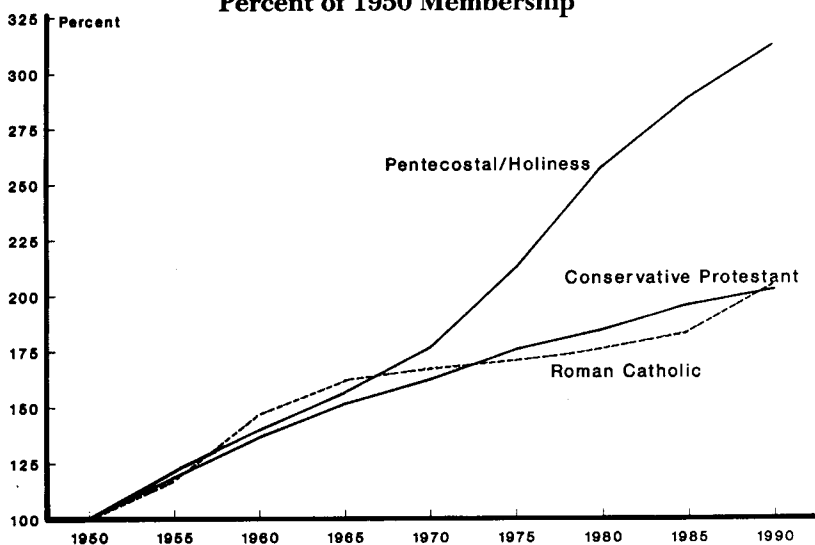
Marty’s conclusion that a seismic shift was occurring drew heavily upon the empirical research reported in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline*. The shift dealt not only with “the mainline yin”—the major focus of that book, but also, “consistently if implicitly, with the evangelical yang” (Marty, 1979:12). In this way Marty called attention to the now familiar divergence of mainline and evangelical membership trends. As is evident in Figures 1.1 and 1.2, the trend lines present a powerful visual image of the situation. And indeed, coupled with other widely read books of the period such as Kelley’s *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (1972), this visual image was “translated in the public imagination as a simplification: religious and spiritual revival was occurring in the conservative churches, and spiritual decay had overtaken the mainline churches” (Hunter, 1987:203).

FIGURE 1.1
Membership of Selected Denominational Families as a
Percent of 1950 Membership



Source: Appendix Table 1.1

FIGURE 1.2
Membership of Selected Denominational Families as a
Percent of 1950 Membership



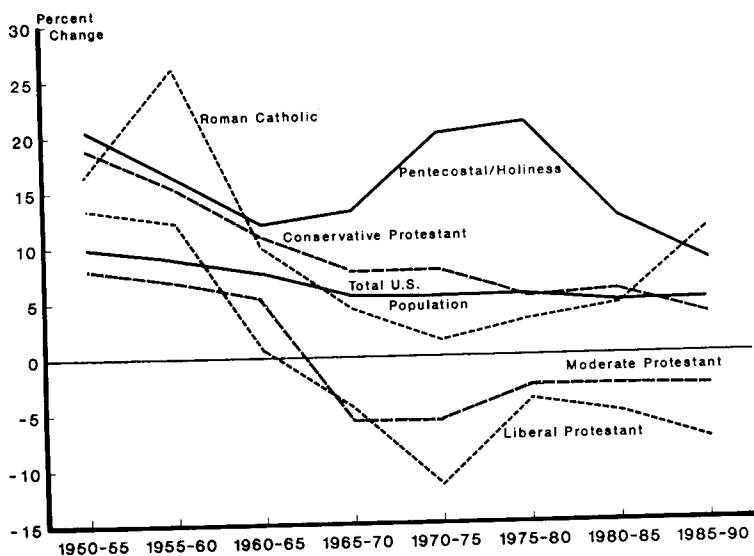
Source: Appendix Table 1.1

With the hindsight of recent research we now know that the conclusion of revival and decay was a rather grievous oversimplification. Focusing on the mainline movement from membership gains to membership losses, the research of the 1970s—including much of our own—missed several important points. First, the growth of the mainline did not suddenly turn downward in the 1960s. It was already slowing in the 1950s! (See Figure 1.3.)

Second, while the popular perception was of a shift in vitality from mainline to conservative denominations beginning in the late 1950s, the reality is reflected in the following facts:

- The growth rate of all Protestant denominational families slowed during the 1950s.
- This slowdown intensified during the 1960s for all Protestant families except Pentecostal/Holiness.
- The growth rates of both moderate and liberal Protestantism have improved since the mid-1960s (although still negative), while the growth rate of conservative Protestantism has continued to slow (although still positive).

FIGURE 1.3
Five-Year Membership Growth Rates by Denominational Family



Source: Appendix Table 1.2

- The Pentecostal/Holiness surge of the late 1960s and 1970s cooled off considerably during the 1980s.
- To the extent membership growth rates are indicative of denominational vitality, Roman Catholicism led the way into the 1990s.¹

As Marty (1979:10) reminded us as he called attention to the seismic shift occurring in American religion: "While church growth and decline are far from being the only ways of measuring religious health, they give at least some indication of how citizens are voting with their bodies." In this spirit, two purposes of this new collection of research on church growth and decline are: (1) to expand our understanding of the changes that were occurring in American religion during the 1960s and early 1970s, and (2) to chart the direction these changes have taken in the decade and a half since the publication of *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*. In doing so, the book provides a window from which to view the changing fortunes of American denominational religion. But the book's primary purpose is more focused and more pragmatic.² It seeks to present a comprehensive collection of the most recent, comparative social research on the dynamics of church growth and decline. It does so in the hope that an increased understanding of these dynamics will lead to more effective responses on the part of religious leaders in American churches and denominations.

Given the avalanche of "church-growth-how-to" books, newsletters, and leadership seminars appearing in recent years, it is puzzling that there has not been a similar outpouring of published empirical research on the subject. Indeed, since *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*, a rigorous, book-length "church growth" study spanning more than a few congregations or a single denomination has not appeared in print. This is not meant to imply that the "how-to" literature is devoid of wisdom. Yet some of it is quite superficial, and much of it is more motivational than programmatic. Nevertheless, the reservoir of "church growth" techniques that have worked somewhere for someone is, if anything, overflowing. What is less clear is why (or in what settings) a given technique works; and why (or in what settings) a given technique does not work. The type of social research reported in this volume provides an insightful journey into the underlying principles that should inform specific programmatic decisions.

I also do not want to minimize the positive contributions of the more probing church growth research focused on single denominations. *The Mainstream Protestant "Decline": The Presbyterian Pattern* (Coalter, Mulder and Weeks, 1990) and *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Hadaway, 1991) are exemplary in this regard. Indeed, the collection of church growth research you are about to read is, in many respects, an exten-

sion of such work—a collection of research findings that moves across liberal and conservative, and black and white Protestantism, as well as Roman Catholicism. Before turning to this research, however, overviews of denominational membership trends in the last half century and changes in the broader religious climate should be helpful.

Membership Trends: An Overview

If one's only measure of American church membership trends since the 1950s was national public opinion poll data, one would be perplexed by all the fuss over church growth. According to the Gallup poll (Princeton Religion Research Center, 1992) the percentage of Americans who are church members was virtually the same in 1991 as it was in 1978 (68%), and is only 5 percentage points lower than poll readings from 1952 and 1965 (73%). The aggregate membership trend for the twenty-six denominations used in Figures 1.1 to 1.3 shows a remarkably similar pattern: the total market share of these denominations (membership as a percent of the total population) dropped only 5 percentage points from the mid-1960s to 1980, and was virtually static from 1980 to 1990 (see Appendix, Table A1.1). In light of this stability, especially during the last decade, the "fuss" over church growth only appears understandable as either: (1) a theologically driven shift toward an increased emphasis on "the Great Commission," or (2) a pragmatic awareness that American denominations had to work harder just to keep up. The research reported here suggests that it is a combination of the two.

Denominational Differences

The combination of theological and practical motivations for the increased concern over church growth and decline comes into clearer focus when it is further noted (as suggested in the language of seismic shift) that it is not the aggregate national trend in church membership that made it a center of attention. Rather, it was that some denominations were growing in members and others were declining. And as noted above, recent research shows that even the identification of winners and losers is more complicated than suggested by earlier assessments of mainline decline and conservative growth. A more nuanced interpretation is required, in part, because we now know that the mainline vs. conservative dichotomy obscures increasingly important divisions within the "Protestant house." But it is also required because we now know that different ways of measuring membership growth illuminate different aspects of its dynamic.

That the former Protestant mainline has moved "to the sideline" is an almost taken-for-granted assumption of recent commentary on the restructuring of American religion. Indeed, phrases such as "the third religious disestablishment" are not uncommon on the lips of American church historians. But the possibility that the old line splintered into sidelines received less consideration. Roof and McKinney's *American Mainline Religion* (1987) makes a strong case for this possibility. Their book shows that in terms of demographics, social and personal values, religious belief and practice, relationship to the mainstream of American culture, and future prospects for institutional viability there are significant differences between what they call the liberal and moderate families of former establishment Protestantism. Within the liberal family they include such denominations as the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Within the moderate family they include The United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Reformed Church in America.

Following Roof and McKinney's classification, Figure 1.1 shows the aggregate forty-year membership trend for a sampling of denominations in each family.³ The membership trends for the two families have much in common, most notably the mid-1960s tipping point from growth to decline. Nevertheless, there is one highly suggestive difference. In regard to both the ascent and subsequent declines of the 1950s, the movement of liberal Protestantism is more extreme.

The Presidential election of born-again Southern Baptist, Democratic Jimmy Carter in 1976, and the co-mingling of television evangelists and conservative Republican politics beginning in 1980 did more to pique America's interest in conservative Protestantism and its internal diversity than did the mainline Protestant declines of the 1960s. But regardless of the source, along with a new curiosity in the public consciousness came a steady stream of scholarship that has greatly enhanced our understanding of the changing nature of this formerly quiet, but deep stream of American denominationalism. As is typically the case with probing inquiry, simplistic old stereotypes give way to more nuanced distinctions. In the case of conservative Protestantism, this process is still unfolding and no single schema of classification has yet to gain general acceptance.

Nevertheless, some consensus is emerging that there are at least two major conservative Protestant families. Both families place a strong emphasis on biblical authority, a conversionist approach to evangelism, and "traditional" American values. For one family this is combined with an emphasis on authoritative doctrine (Hunter, 1983; Ammerman, 1987); for the other, an emphasis on sanctification and the present-day operation of the Holy Spirit

(Quebedeaux, 1983; Poloma, 1989). The most prominent denominational representative of the former family, to which for present purposes I restrict the label "conservative Protestant," is the Southern Baptist Convention. The most prominent representative of the latter family, which for present purposes I call Pentecostal/Holiness, is the Assemblies of God.⁴

The significance of the conservative vs. Pentecostal/Holiness distinction for understanding recent trends in church membership is illustrated in Figure 1.2. Like Figure 1.1, it charts the aggregate forty-year membership trends for a sampling of denominations in each family.⁵ The figure speaks for itself. From 1950 through the mid-1960s the growth trajectories of the two families are nearly indistinguishable. By the late 1960s, however, Pentecostal/Holiness growth noticeably begins to outpace conservative growth. The divergence accelerates dramatically throughout the 1970s. During the 1980s the Pentecostal/Holiness surge slows, and by the end of the decade its growth trajectory returns to near parallel with that of the conservative family. Figure 1.2 also shows the forty-year membership trend for Roman Catholicism. With a few minor deviations, it closely resembles that of the conservative Protestant family.⁶

No portrait of American denominationalism is complete without including the historical black denominations. Unfortunately, no membership trend data exist for this important and sizable family. Recent estimates suggest that black Baptists alone include nearly 7 million members (*Churches and Church Membership in the United States: 1990*). There are some national public opinion poll trend data on black church involvement, and the Nelsen and Kanagy chapter in this book reports on a portion of it. The conclusions reached by Nelsen and Kanagy are consistent with the findings of *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990)—the first major study of the black church in over thirty years. Black church membership appears to have held its ground in the last decade or so, except among young adults in the inner cities of the industrial North.

New Measures, New Perspective

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 present membership trends in terms of absolute numbers. The data answer the question: are there more or less members from year to year? From the perspective of institutional maintenance and resource management, this is arguably the best measure of membership trends. It was also the clear pattern of decline within mainline Protestantism on this measure, beginning in the mid-1960s, that initially caught the public's attention. But there are two other approaches to measuring membership growth that provide different angles of vision. One focuses on "market share," the other on "growth rate." Both have been briefly introduced above—the former in

the discussion of membership trends as measured by national public opinion surveys; the latter in the initial discussion in Figure 1.3.

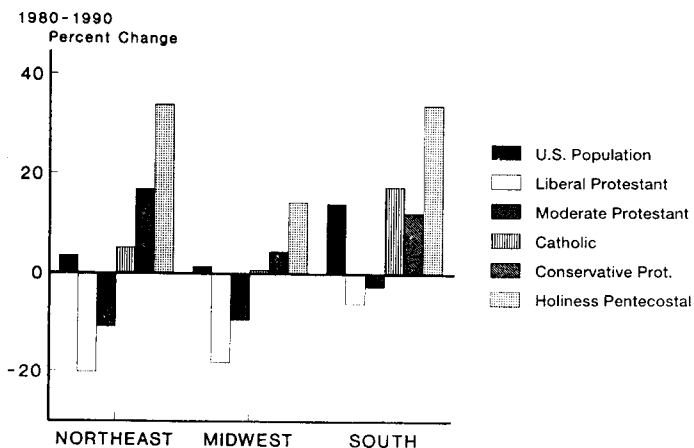
Market Share and Opportunity. When applied to church membership, "market share" typically refers to membership as a percentage of the total population. It views membership in relation to the total pool of persons available to be members. Or, to put it yet another way, market share measures growth relative to contextual opportunity. From such a perspective 10% membership growth in an area with 5% population growth is better than 10% membership growth in an area with 20% population growth. Given that the total population of the U.S. has grown throughout the postwar period, the liberal and moderate declines in number of members since the 1960s shown in Figure 1.1 take on added significance. In the last twenty-five years these denominational families actually lost members during a period of increasing opportunity!

But a market share perspective also tempers our interpretation of the continual growth in members of other denominational families. Indeed the membership market share of conservative Protestants and Roman Catholics has not changed since the early 1970s, and the market share of the Pentecostal/Holiness family has only inched upward—from .08% of the U.S. population in 1965, to 1.3% in 1990 (see Table A1.1 in the Appendix).

Of course, the membership of most denominational families is more concentrated in some regions of the United States than others and different regions of the country have different rates of population growth. Putting these observations together led some scholars to suggest that a large portion of the difference in membership growth among denominational families may be due to the concentration of low growth families in low growth regions of the country (e.g., Hutchinson, 1986). Figures 1.4 and 1.5 challenge such an interpretation. They compare 1980 and 1990 membership change for each denominational family with the change in the U.S. population by region of the country.

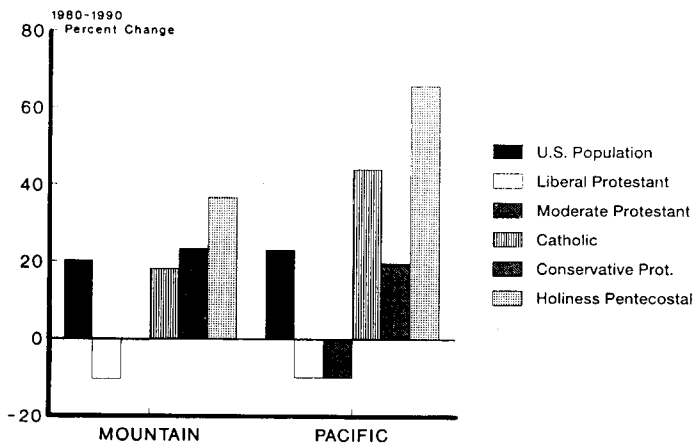
The two most notable patterns in the figures are that liberal and moderate Protestantism are losing members in all regions, even those with the greatest population growth; and that the Pentecostal/Holiness family is increasing market share (that is, membership growth is greater than population growth) in all regions. Roman Catholicism is gaining market share in all regions except the mountain states. Its increasing market share is especially dramatic on the Pacific coast, where it is apparently capitalizing on its historical relationship to Hispanics. Conservative Protestantism is gaining market share in three of the five regions. One of the regions in which it is losing market share, however, is its "home base" in the South; the other is the most rapidly growing region of the country—the Pacific coast—where it is losing out to both Roman Catholics and the Pentecostal/Holiness family.

FIGURE 1.4
1980-1990 Membership Change by Region by
Denominational Family and Total U.S. Population



Source:
 Quinn et al. (1982); Bradley et al. (1992)

FIGURE 1.5
1980-1990 Membership Change by Region by
Denominational Family and Total U.S. Population



Source:
 Quinn et al. (1982); Bradley et al. (1992)

Growth Rates and Internal Resources. Still another perspective on growth is provided through an analysis of growth rates. In its simplest form a growth rate is the percent change in membership across some period of time. In contrast to market share which, as noted above, is membership change relative to external opportunity—the pool of possible members; growth rates measure membership change relative to internally available resources—the pool of existing members. In terms of membership growth, growth rates are the statistical equivalent of the biblical adage that to whom much is given much is expected. The use of growth rates also, as already noted in our initial discussion of Figure 1.3, dramatically changes old stereotypes about differences in membership growth among denominational families.

Figure 1.3 shows the trend in five-year growth rates from 1950 to 1990 for the five denominational families and the U.S. population. Many of the salient patterns visible there have already been noted, but two additional observations deserve comment. First, the growth rate of conservative Protestantism has been moving downward since at least 1950, and in the late 1980s it actually dropped below the growth rate of the U.S. population. The latter is significant because it means that the continuing slowdown in conservative Protestant growth has now reached the point of decreasing national market share.

Second, the growth rate trends for conservative and moderate Protestants are the least volatile of any denominational family. Since these two families are arguably the least culturally extreme within American Protestantism, the relative stability of their growth rate suggests that the closer a denominational ethos is to the underlying mainstream of American culture, the lower the risk of steep decline on the one hand, but also the lower the possibility of dramatic growth on the other.

Growth Equals Additions Minus Losses. There is one additional perspective on membership growth and decline that has generated much discussion, especially concerning the numerical declines in mainline Protestantism. This perspective draws attention to the simple fact that numerical membership change is the total of membership additions minus membership losses. All denominations, like most congregations, have both additions and losses every year. Numerical growth, of course, is the result of having more additions than losses; and numerical decline is the result of having more losses than additions. But it is important to remember that numerical decline can result from either an increase in losses or from a decrease in additions.

One of the predominant myths about mainline declines in the late 1960s is that they were the result of increased losses. More specifically, the popular

rhetoric of the time suggested that the declines were primarily due to members leaving because of denominational involvement in social action. Many people still believe this today. Nevertheless, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950–1978* (Hoge and Roozen, 1979) clearly showed that the mainline membership declines in the late 1960s and early 1970s were more a result of fewer people joining than of members leaving. But this isn't the final word on the story.

Greer's chapter in the current book suggests that social justice advocacy did have some detrimental effect on membership growth. But consistent with Hoge and Roozen, this was not because people went away mad. Rather, it was because the shift in theological priorities toward social justice concerns pulled resources away from recruitment/evangelism and new church development.

Greer's chapter also indicates that each of the four mainline denominations examined reemphasized evangelism and new church development during the 1980s. Juxtaposed with the evidence from Figure 1.3 that mainline declines moderated somewhat during the 1980s, one is tempted to conclude that the improvement must be because of increased additions. Resist the temptation. Although a comprehensive study of mainline additions and losses over the last twenty-five years has yet to appear, our preliminary examination of data from several denominations suggests that the relative improvement of growth rates in the last decade is due more to decreased losses (despite increased deaths related to the aging of the mainline membership), than to increased additions. Indeed the data show that additions have decreased steadily since at least the mid-1960s.

The Independent Sector

The focus of this book is American denominational religion, and the introductory discussion of membership trends thus far has been limited to that. But the high visibility of new religious movements during the 1960s and more recent impressions of a proliferation of nondenominational (i.e., independent) congregations are helpful reminders that the American religious marketplace is broader than denominationalism.

Until 1990, national membership figures for independent congregations were nonexistent. Thanks to a cooperative effort between the International MegaChurch Research Center directed by John Vaughan, and the steering committee for *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: 1990* (CCM:90; Bradley, et al., 1992) we now have a baseline of independent church membership data for every county in the United States. The data have some limitations, most significantly in identifying only independent congregations

with "memberships" of 300 or more, and primarily such congregations in metropolitan areas with a population of 20,000 or more. The data, therefore, are clearly an undercount, and not a count of members per se, but more closely akin to a count of what the CCM:90 calls "adherents." Additionally the data are only for 1990 and therefore preclude a direct confirmation of the widely shared perception that both the number of independent congregations and the total membership of independents has increased dramatically in the past ten to twenty years.

Its limitations notwithstanding, the CCM:90 data provide an instructive first look at churches' independent sector. Even given the undercount, the 2,001,327 total adherents reported in CCM:90 for independent congregations makes the independent church sector larger than all but eight U.S. denominations. It pegs the independent church sector as just a little smaller than the Assemblies of God and Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and just slightly larger than the United Church of Christ.

Like most denominations, independent church membership is not evenly distributed across the United States. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 show the regional distribution of independent church adherents, comparing it with that of the three denominations noted above. These three denominations are used for comparative purposes not only because they are roughly equal in overall size, but also because each represents a different denominational family. Two patterns in the figures stand out. First, the independent church sector is less regionally concentrated than any of the three comparative denominations. Second, to the extent that there is a regional tilt in the independent church sector it is from relatively low concentrations in the northeast to increasingly higher concentrations as one moves south and west.

The only differentiation the CCM:90 makes in its count of independent church adherents is between adherents of charismatic and noncharismatic congregations. Figure 1.8 presents this breakdown, again by region and for the nation as a whole. Overall, CCM:90 reports half again as many adherents of noncharismatic than charismatic congregations. But this overall figure masks significant regional differences. In New England and the South Atlantic noncharismatics outnumber charismatics by two to one; and in the East North Central and East South Central, by more than three to one. But in the mid-Atlantic states charismatics outnumber noncharismatics by two to one; and in the West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific regions the two groups are roughly equal in size. Figure 1.8 also shows that charismatics are strongest (in terms of market share) in the West South Central. This also is the region of greatest strength for the Assemblies of God (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7). Both groups also share relative strength in the Mountain and Pacific regions of the West.

FIGURE 1.6
Total Adherents as a Percentage of the Population by
Region for Independents and Selected Denominations

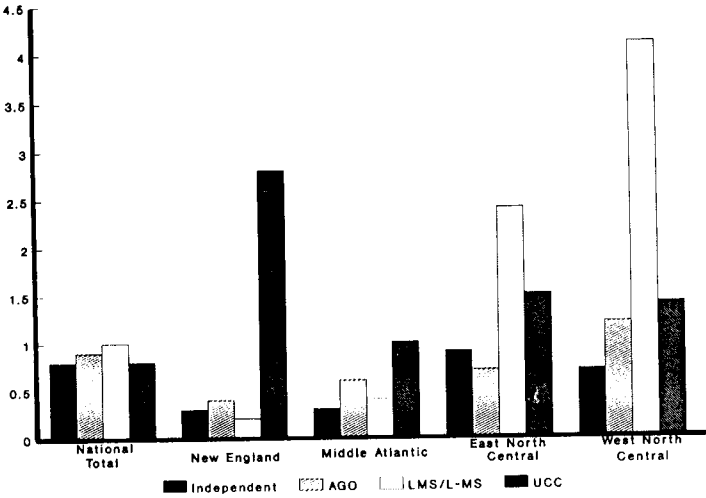


FIGURE 1.7
Total Adherents as a Percentage of the Population by
Region for Independents and Selected Denominations

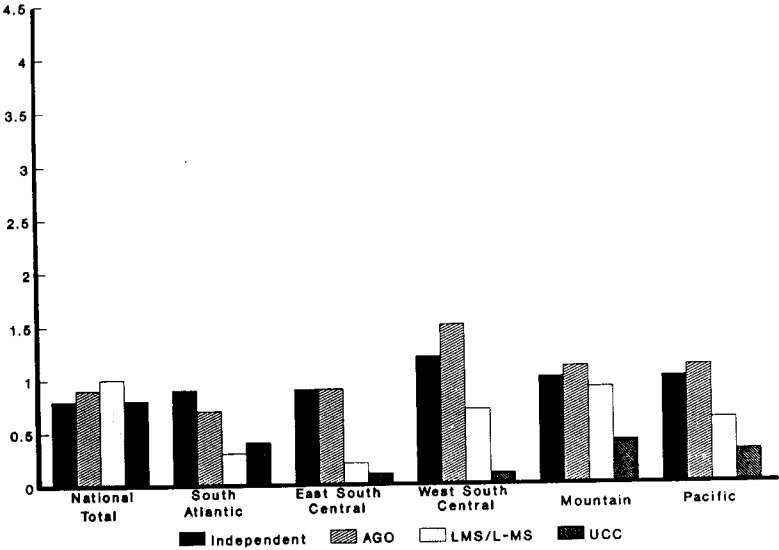
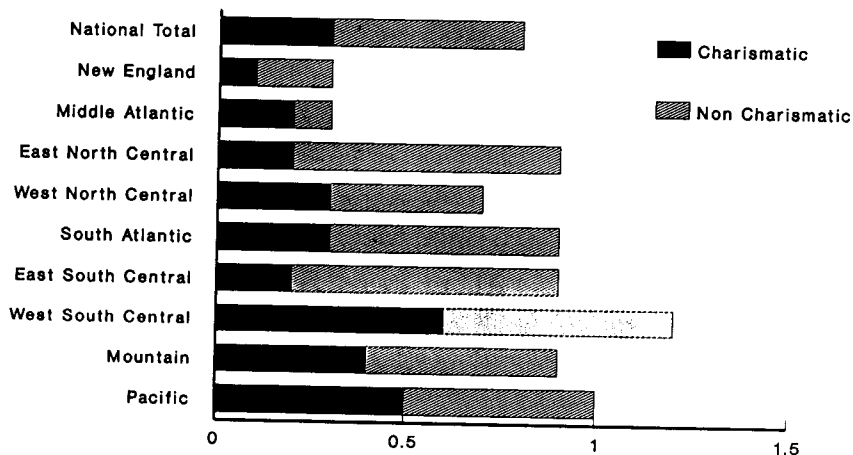


FIGURE 1.8
Charismatic and Noncharismatic Independent Adherents as a
Percent of the Population by Region



The new religious movements that rose around the edges of the counterculture during the 1960s were more sect-like than church-like, but they did attract a good number of church dropouts. We now know that their increasing visibility during that time was greatly disproportional to their numerical growth. Participants in the movements were almost exclusively young adults and even within this segment of society, primarily college students. Scholars tend to concur, however, that the movements' high visibility contributed an important symbolic dimension to the more general cultural upheaval of the 1960s. As Robbins, Anthony, and Richardson (1978) note, the new religious movements were of two general types: mystical-therapeutic and neo-fundamentalist. The former synthesized scientific, psychological, and religious (particularly Eastern mystical) themes in a quest for personal meaning. The latter mixed cosmological dualism and traditional morality in a protest against the relativism and permissiveness of modern society. Of the two types, the mystical-therapeutic was numerically the largest. The symbolic significance of the two streams, according to Wuthnow (1988), was to broaden and refine the outer limits of religious respectability. The mystical-therapeutic pushed to the left; the neo-fundamentalist pushed to the right. Although the "new" movements of the 1960s are still among us, both their visibility and their energy have dissipated. The dissipating wake of the mystical-therapeutic appears to have merged in the 1980s as a part of the amorphous "New Age" movement. The neo-fundamentalist stream of the movement appears to have been co-opted into the more established networks of conservative, and especially Pentecostal/Holiness, Protestantism.

The Broader Context of Religious Change

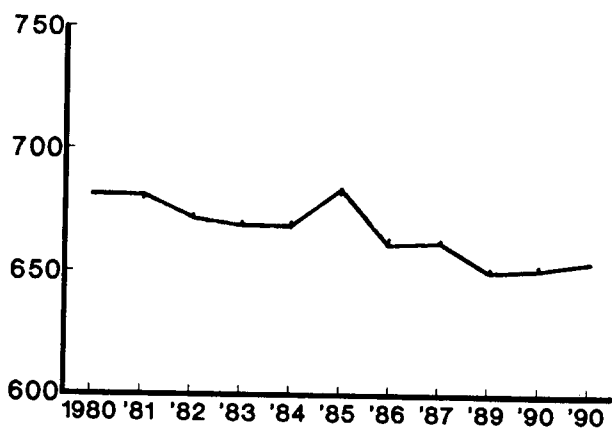
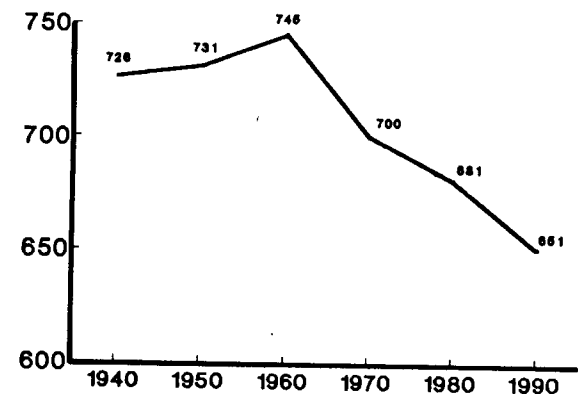
Many people agree with theologian Robert Hudnut's (1975) assertion: "Church growth is not the point." But even if one disagrees on theological grounds, Hudnut's statement is a helpful reminder that church membership and participation are just one of several dimensions of individual religiosity, and membership growth is only one of many priorities competing for denominational and congregational attention. From the perspective of church growth these "other" dimensions of religiosity and denominational attention provide the broader context of religious change that shapes and is shaped by membership trends.

National public opinion polls provide a helpful reading of trends in individual religiosity and perceptions of organized religion since the 1940s. Indeed, since the early 1970s the amount of public opinion poll data on religion is almost overwhelming. Fortunately for present purposes, the Princeton Religion Index (Princeton Religion Research Center, 1990) provides a concise summary of the extensive and extended religious soundings of the Gallup poll. To the extent that a single "best" empirical barometer of the United States' religious climate exists, it is the Princeton Religion Index. The index is a composite of several measures of individual religious belief and practice, self-perceived saliency of religion in one's life, and attitudes toward organized religion. Figure 1.9 includes a listing of the different items included in the composite. More importantly, Figure 1.9 shows both the fifty-year trend in the index, and a more focused look at the trend during the 1980s.

The most dramatic image in the index's fifty-year trend, and perhaps the most important perspective it adds to our understanding of membership trends, is that the 1960s represent a profoundly transitional decade for religion in the United States. The tipping of mainline Protestantism from growth to decline in 1965 is only one manifestation of a much broader seismic shift in American religion.

As noted in the discussion of market share as a measure of contextual opportunity, the percentage of the U.S. population who are church members has only declined five percentage points since the 1950s. In comparing this to the index's fifty-year trend, a second helpful perspective on membership trends emerges. Church membership has declined considerably less since the 1950s than has the overall religious climate. The scale of the index distorts the visual magnitude of the comparison to some extent, but the general point is still true. The overall religious climate as measured in the index has declined about twice as much as church membership since 1950.

FIGURE 1.9
Fifty-Year Trend in the Princeton Religion Index*



*** PRINCETON RELIGION INDEX
 IS A COMPOSITE OF:**

- Belief in God
- Having a Religious Preference
- Believing Religion Can Answer Today's Problems
- Church Membership
- Confidence in Organized Religion
- Feeling Clergy are Honest
- Viewing Religion as Very Important in One's Life
- Church/Synagogue Attendance

Switching to the index's trend through the 1980s, one sees that the traumatic plunge of the 1960s has given way to a plateau of stability. But like the membership trends for the 1980s seen in Figure 1.3, and despite a few minor blips up and down, the overall pattern is one of creeping decline. Nevertheless, a careful comparison of the index trend for the 1980s to the overall trend in church membership for the same period suggests that even during the 1980s the slowing of membership growth rates was slightly less than the downward movement in the broader religious climate.

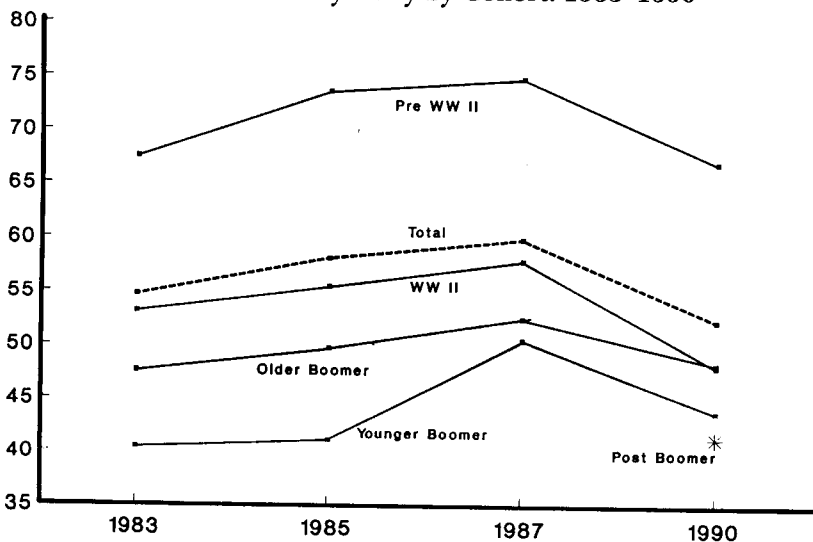
Research of the late 1970s was quite specific in locating the major source of the religious reversal of the 1960s. It was a unique set of social and cultural changes carried along by the baby boom generation's movement into young adulthood. This now taken-for-granted fact is documented in the research literature with chart after chart showing how dramatically less religious the boomer cohort was from previous generations on just about every measure of religion for which data were available (see, for example, Hoge and Roozen, 1979).

Given the centrality of cohort differences for understanding the religious reversal of the 1960s, it is interesting to look at how cohort trends in religion have played out since then. Figures 1.10 and 1.11 do just that, the first for prayer and the second for worship attendance. Each figure includes the trend for five cohorts ranging from those born prior to World War II to those born after 1965 (post baby boom). Each figure also includes the total population trend (i.e., all cohorts combined). Each figure is based on data from the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey series. One covers the period 1975 to 1990; the other covers the period 1983 to 1990.

A few summary comments must suffice. First, in comparison to the dramatic divergence in cohort religious belief and practice during the 1960s, the trend lines in Figures 1.10 and 1.11 are strikingly parallel. That is, the cohorts all tend to move up or down together. The dynamics of religious change in the 1980s have affected all cohorts equally. Second, looking at just the 1990 level of prayer in Figure 1.10 and worship attendance in Figure 1.11 for each cohort, one finds the cohorts arranged in exactly the same order—the youngest cohort at the lowest level and the oldest cohort at the highest level. This is in stark contrast to the situation in the early 1950s, when age differences in religion were minimal (e.g., Roozen, 1979). One result of the religious transition of the sixties, therefore, appears to be the creation of an enduring stratification of religious expression by age.

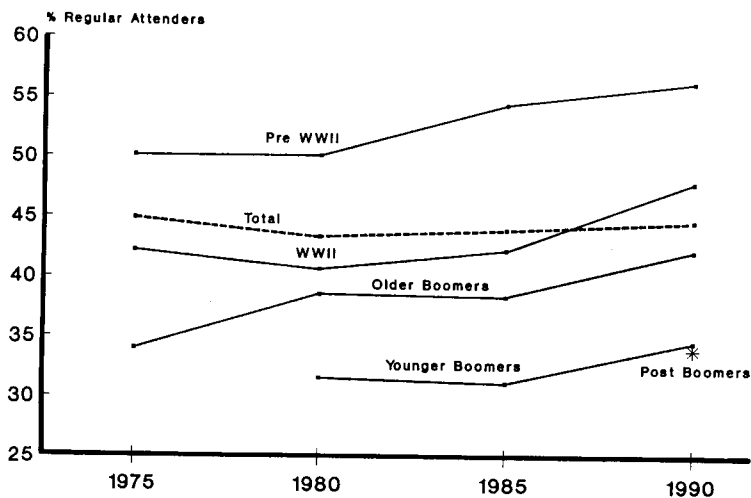
Third, in Figure 1.11 one sees a pattern that is important to the argument of several chapters in this book. There is more movement in each of the cohort trends than in the overall trend. Indeed, the upward movement for each cohort is distinct; but the overall trend barely moves at all. The overall

FIGURE 1.10
Percent Who Pray Daily by Cohort: 1983–1990



Source: NORC General Social Surveys

FIGURE 1.11
Percent Regular Attenders by Cohort: 1975–1990*



*Regular attenders are those indicating that they attended at least two or three times a month

Source: NORC General Social Surveys

trend increases less than any of the individual cohorts because of the interrelationship between the age stratification in religion noted above, and what demographers call "cohort replacement." The specifics of cohort replacement are too complex to explain here.⁷ The important point for now is that, as previously seen for church membership, if one only looks at the overall trend, one would miss significant movement among critical subgroups.

Finally, in both Figures 1.10 and 1.11, from the early to mid-1980s the "total" trend moves upward, consistent with the mid-1980s upward blip in the Princeton Religion Index (Figure 1.9). But from the mid-1980s to 1990, the total prayer and worship attendance trends move in opposite directions—prayer downward, worship attendance ever so slightly upward. As was suggested in the comparison of membership trends to the Princeton Religion Index's fifty-year trend, religious participation trends are at least somewhat independent from the trends in other dimensions of religiosity.

In the broad sweep provided by a comparison of the index's trend and that of membership since 1950, the independence of membership from the overall religious climate manifests itself through the fact that the downward trend in membership is less severe than that for the index. The significance of this fact comes into clearer focus when it is further noted that the index is weighted toward measures of traditional belief and commitment. The divergence in the two trends means, therefore, that an increasing number of church members are nontraditional in their belief and commitment. This may hardly seem like a startling observation, especially for church leaders in mainline Protestantism. But if Wuthnow (1988) is correct that the driving force in the restructuring of American religion is not an increasing polarization between the church and the unchurched, or an increasing polarization between liberal and conservative denominations, but rather the increasing polarization between liberal and traditional church members within denominations; then the shifting balance of these two groups will be critical to the future of denominational religion.

A Framework for Understanding Church Growth

The organization of the chapters in this book follows from the simple fact: Denominations grow as individuals join congregations. Each one is a source of initiative or response in the overall growth equation. Accordingly, the reader will find three major sections in the book, each containing several chapters, each chapter reporting original research. The first section focuses on denominations; the second section focuses on congregations; and the third section focuses on the individual. Each section begins with a brief introduction that not only serves to set its chapters within the broader con-

text of research related to the section topic, but also summarizes the major conclusions of each chapter.

The denomination-congregation-individual organization of the book should not be interpreted, however, to mean that the three are unrelated. Indeed, they form an interrelated whole in the overall growth equation—each shaping and shaped by the others. An exploration of church membership initiated at one level inevitably leads to questions about the others. The concluding chapter by Hadaway, therefore, does not attempt to summarize each chapter (this is done in the section introductions). Rather, it provides an integrated interpretation of the whole. It does so first from the perspective of the interrelationship among denomination, congregation, and social-cultural changes that enter the growth equation through individuals. It then uses this integrated perspective to address the possibilities for future growth within different denominational families.

Although we use the growth = denomination + congregation + individual equation to structure the organization of chapters, the reader will find another important framework for understanding church growth and decline very much in evidence. It is from *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950–1978* (Hoge and Roozen, 1979), a book that is the inspiration for the current collection of research. As one of the first cross-denominational studies of church growth and decline, and the first major piece after Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (1972), *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950–1978* received a good bit of attention—both positive and negative. But one thing that just about everyone found helpful was the book's broad conceptual framework for thinking about the multitude of factors that affect membership trends. The framework contained four categories developed by crosscutting two dimensions. One dimension ran from the local level (of the congregation) to the national level. The second dimension distinguished between those things largely outside the church's control, which were called contextual factors, and those things internal to the life of congregations or denominations that were more or less subject to their control, which were called institutional factors. The four categories produced by crosscutting the two dimensions, are:

- National contextual factors—pervasive social and cultural trends
- National institutional factors—denominational ethos, polity, and program
- Local contextual factors—unique social, cultural, and demographic aspects of a local congregation's immediate environment
- Local institutional factors—the ethos, structure, and program of local congregations

The research and interpretation in this book takes the Hoge and Roozen distinction between context and institutional, and applies it to each of our three levels—the denomination, the congregation, and the individual. The section on denominations, therefore, addresses the interplay between national contextual and national institutional factors. The section on congregations addresses the interplay between local contextual and local institutional factors. And the section on individuals addresses both how social and cultural forces (contextual factors), and how characteristics and perceptions of congregations and denominations (institutional factors) influence individual decisions about whether or not to become church members.