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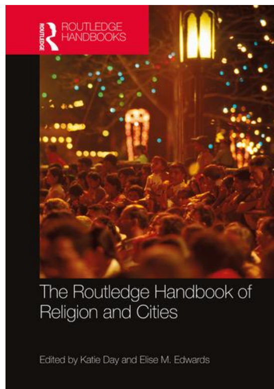

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Studying religion and cities

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STUDYING RELIGION AND CITIES

Emergent meanings and methodologies

Katie Day

The world's population is overwhelmingly religious, and becoming more so. It is estimated that the percentage of global citizens who are religiously unaffiliated will fall in the next 30 years, from 16% in 2010 to about 13% in 2050.[1] Another shift projected in the same time frame is that more of us will live in cities. Currently, 55% are urban dwellers, but that proportion is on track to swell to more than 2/3 of the world's people.[2] Certainly the growth in cities raises questions of sustainability of climate and urban structures which will, no doubt, be researched in great detail. But what about a growing religious population in these urban contexts? In what ways will religion be shaped by new urban realities? And how will religion shape these cities? To ignore these concurrent trends is to assume they have little to do with each other—that urbanization will proceed apace and that religion is benign, swept up in the tide, without agency.

As was argued in the introduction, there is a very thin tradition of studying religion *in* cities. There is certainly research on religions and faith communities, but it is too often decontextualized. In a parallel research universe, urban studies, urban planning, and urban theory have largely ignored religion as a factor in the organization and life of cities. This oversight is a just beginning to be a point of self-critique in these fields.[3]

Although literatures on both cities and religion are vast, the ecological model directs our research gaze to the interaction of the two: what are the processes at work by which religions are being shaped by their urban contexts and reciprocally shaping the neighborhoods and cities in which they are located? What would cities look like if religions evaporated? How would this impact urban cultures, economies, politics, spatial arrangements, and built environments? And what about religious groups and institutions in cities is influenced by the particularities of their urban location? How does city space influence religious practices, beliefs, civic participation, and habitation? The narrow focus in the ecological model, in other words, is on those dynamic synapses between religions and cities, each changed by their co-existence and, more importantly, their interaction.

The complexity of the organizing research question is daunting and relatively few researchers have waded in. It requires knowledge and skills in both urban studies and religion. Historically, there have been some influential studies that have become touchstones for the developing field of religion and cities, which have contributed theoretical frames and methodological approaches. Although a full sociology of knowledge analysis of the field is beyond the scope of this chapter, some of these touchstones are included below.

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In 1899, African American sociologist W.E.B. DuBois published *The Philadelphia Negro*. It was the result of a 15-month study based at the University of Pennsylvania "into the condition of the forty thousand or more people of Negro blood now living in the city of Philadelphia."[4] Free Blacks had long lived in Philadelphia which had consequently become a destination for the Underground Railroad for many escaping slavery. After Emancipation, there was an influx of African Americans bringing the population to over 40,000 (out of a total population of just over 1,000,000). After carefully recounting the history of "Negroes" in Philadelphia, DuBois presents his findings of a methodical door-to-door survey, hand-drawn mapping, and participant observation in the community. He describes the demographics, institutions, and associations of Black Philadelphians in meticulous detail, with religion occupying an important dynamic in their settlement and organization. Their Southern rural religiosity was changed by the new urban context. But Philadelphia was changed as well—culturally, politically, and economically. DuBois reported that there were 55 Negro churches at the time, which were creating economic opportunities (such as catering companies), relief networks, and a political base. Not only did the newcomers represent a voting bloc, they had economic power as well. The churches owned properties cumulatively worth $907,729,[5] which would be valued at over $28,000,000 today.

DuBois documented the social conditions and everyday life of Black Philadelphians in painstaking attention to detail, both in gathering his quantitative data and in the narrative of his ethnographic research. Although he describes everything from housing, health, crime, and education to race relations, his purpose goes beyond just describing a reality. DuBois hoped his research could not only enlighten but facilitate social change.

There were other touchstone researchers working in the first half of the twentieth century who advanced the study of religion and cities. The influence of the Chicago School of urban theory cannot be overestimated in informing scholarship in the field. In the 1920s, Robert Park, Louis Wirth, and Ernest Burgess at The University of Chicago were developing an "ecological" approach to analyzing cities as systems of actors in symbiotic and dynamic relationships through which their spatial and social arrangements developed. They were appropriating the biological model of Darwinism, a dominant paradigm whose influence extended far beyond life sciences. Even though religion did not figure into their analysis as a major actor in the growth and change of cities, the model was a significant one for researchers of urban religion. Samuel C. Kincheloe was an ordained clergyperson who got his Ph.D. in sociology at The University of Chicago at the height of the Chicago School. He joined the faculty of Chicago Theological Seminary to teach sociology of religion, and drew on the ecological approach in analyzing the interaction of Chicago's changing demographics and the city's religious institutions.[6] Central to the biological model is the relationship of the environmental ecology to the institutions within which it must adapt or change in order to survive.

Sociologist H. Paul Douglass, trained at both The University of Chicago and Columbia University, was a contemporary of Kincheloe and shared his research interest in adaptation and survival within the urban ecology. As Director of the Institute for Social and Religious Research, he oversaw a dizzying number of studies using surveys of churches in cities. He published almost a book a year for the 13 years he was at the Institute, with his best-known work being *Church in the Changing City*.[7] He too was focused on how cities were changing through im/migration and what that meant for the survival of city churches. Before "white flight" had been coined in the following generation, Douglass was documenting through quantitative research that institutional survival was leading churches to follow their constituents to the growing suburbs, a social distancing by race and class.[8] Far from generating research for its own sake, Douglass hoped that data could be used to transcend divisive social boundaries and foster religious unity.

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Later, as a project within the Works Projects Administration in 1940, sociologist St. Clair Drake further drew on the ecological model in studying the proliferation of African American churches as a result of migration from the South into Chicago.[9] In his use of the model, Drake documented that, while new Black churches in Chicago were a direct result of larger movements of people, this did not suggest that the mutual engagement of city and religion was a passive, "natural" dynamic. Rather, expanding on Kincheloe and Douglass who saw the impact of the city on religion, Drake found that churches had agency in shaping the city politically and economically, as well as culturally. The city also had agency in shaping the religious institutions and where they would be located, especially through economic and cultural forces that constructed segregation. There is resonance with DuBois in his analysis of race, class, religion, and context for The University of Chicago-trained social scientist, an intellectual influence he later recognized.

Historian John T. McGreevy also analyzed the ecological dynamics of religion and the mapping of American cities in his book on the development of Catholic parishes.[10] As Catholic immigrants arrived from Europe in the last century, the Church established ethnic-specific congregations throughout cities. Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, and German congregations in imposing buildings "anchored" neighborhoods. They became social centers, reinforcing ethnic identities and solidarity not only for the church members but for neighborhoods as well. But their shaping of cities extended beyond ethnic identity to the construction of racial identity as well. The migration into northern cities of African Americans coarsened white identity, even as it challenged church leadership's professed commitment to a universal church. McGreevy's analysis teases out the subtle and complex mutual impact of religion and cities and is a model of an historical ecological approach.

Another urban historian who has also incorporated ethnographic methods is Robert Orsi, whose contribution to the field cannot be overstated. His 1985 book, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*,[11] has been regarded as a classic in the field. Orsi used both historical research in document analysis and ethnographic interviews to drill down into the "lived religion" of Italian immigrants in Harlem in one formational annual festival of devotion to the Madonna of Mt. Carmel. This work came at a time when urban theory was just beginning to recognize culture as an important variable in the development of cities, along with political and economic capital. Orsi locates his study in this space: "Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds."[12] Orsi sees the everyday religious practices of believers as generative of social capital and empowerment in individuals. Even for poor Italian immigrants, this creates a sense of agency in engaging the city, rather than just adapting to it. He represents the religious experience of his interlocutors with deliberate respect, regarding them as subjects instead of objects. Later, this academic received letters from those he had interviewed saying that they had "recognized themselves" in his text.

Orsi later edited a collection of research on cities and religions, *Gods of the City*,[13] which represents an emerging generation of scholarship. The ten contributors present findings of ethnographic research from a variety of cities and religious contexts, including Japanese Protestants in Seattle, Afro-Cuban Santeria in Havana and New York, Hindus in Washington DC, and a Haitian Vodou community in New York. There is a diversity of academic disciplines represented among the writers, from history, anthropology, and art history to folklore. Orsi offers a substantial introduction that surveys the history of urban theory and imaginaries, and again articulates his view that religions in cities are inextricably related. Context shapes religious communities which impact their urban neighborhoods. "The spaces of the cities, their different topographies

and demographics, are fundamental to the kinds of religious phenomena that emerge in them."[14] The reciprocal process is also at work.

> City people have acted on and with the spaces of the city to make religious meanings in many different ways. They have appropriated public spaces for themselves and transformed them into venues for shaping, displaying and celebrating their inherited and emergent ways of life and understandings of the world.[15]

This paradigm is reflected in these varied ethnographies. As in *The Madonna of 115th Street*, the incorporation of photographs adds to the embodiment of the subjects as subjects. In their appreciative representation of lived religion, the subjects should be able to "recognize themselves" as presented in text and image.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the interrelationship of cities and religion was beginning to be taken seriously as indicated by an increase in publications, presence in academic guilds, research programs and, critically, funding. There was also a developing paradigm, a much-expanded version of the Chicago School's ecological model, and with it some common research methodologies.

An important figure in this development was Lowell W. Livezey, a curious and energetic entrepreneurial researcher, who organized and led the Religion in Urban America Program (RUAP), based at the University of Illinois in Chicago. In the second half of the twentieth century, cities had experienced radical shifts through deindustrialization, increased im/migration into and emigration out of cities, spatial dislocation, and social polarization, all captured in the term "urban restructuring." At the same time, religion was also undergoing its own restructuring, as religious pluralism was increasing and established institutional structures were declining while newer religions were growing. In an ecological frame, Livezey posed the question of how the two might be related: were dramatic changes in cities and religions in some way mutually engaging? Whereas the original urban ecology model would focus on adaptation and survival, Livezey posed his question differently: "Congregations are adapting to profound changes in context, but our interest goes beyond their strategies of survival and adaptation to consider how and to what extent they may reflect, resist, or influence the change itself."[16]

Influenced by the earlier research of Samuel Kinchloe, Livezey designed a research project, well-funded by the Lilly Endowment, which enabled a research team to study 75 faith communities in 8 neighborhoods throughout Chicago over a 3-year period (1992–1995). The research methods were ethnographic for the most part in religiously varied sites. Research teams represented both "insider and outsider status," as explained by Livezey: "because we wanted to observe our subjects 'through each other's eyes,' aware that we had different capacities for perception and distortion."[17] So a Muslim researcher would study a mosque, along with a non-Muslim, or a white Catholic might be included in an African American Protestant site. As with Orsi's work, photographs enabled a visual portal into the study; they also included maps to get a sense of the spatial location.

Though the sites represented diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, size, and religious tradition, the RUAP team analyzed the subtle dynamics of urban and religious restructuring. The religious institutions had experienced the dislocation of urban restructuring in different ways, but all were "made up of people whose frames of reference have been shaken by some combination of structural and cultural change."[18] The religious institutions responded in different ways, engaging the challenges of their context directly (through social action) and indirectly (through cultural production and community formation). However, in Livezey's analysis of the ethnographic findings and that of Stephen Warner in the Epilogue, the cultural production of

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these groups is not serving the construction of insularity and intolerance (as in the early ethnic parishes studied by McGreevy) but in fact is the religious agency through which these communities are creating moral meaning and pathways to bridging divisive boundaries and dislocations.

Around the same time, Nancy Tatom Ammerman was directing a multi-city research project, the Congregations in Changing Communities Project, the findings of which are reported in *Congregation and Community*.[19] Also funded by the Lilly Endowment, this ambitious project studied 23 congregations in 9 different communities, located in the metropolises of Los Angeles, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, and Indianapolis, which had undergone cultural, demographic, and economic change. Building on the work of H. Paul Douglass, the big question for Ammerman was how existing faith communities changed as a result of shifts in their urban ecologies. A mixed research methodology was used, including survey data, participant observation, and structured interviews. Researchers directed their attention particularly at the dynamics around resources, authority, and cultures. They found that these communities of faith responded to contextual change in different ways, and were generators of social capital. However, like Livezey's understanding of cultural production, Ammerman resists dichotomized analyses of public/private religion which support a cultural wars thesis interpretation or relegate bonding social capital to privatism. "It is one of the ironies of social life that individualism and communalism are utterly intertwined."[20] The context is impacted through social ties formed within the congregation that then form the basis for organizational link with other local, state, and national entities.

In the first decade of the millennium, several other works were published drawing on the ecological model to research the interaction of religions and cities, building on earlier works. Nancy L. Eiesland looked at the relationship of urban and religious restructuring in *A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb*,[21] a study that grew out of her research on the Ammerman project. At a time when economic development was driving rampant "urban sprawl," Atlanta had seen new housing construction rapidly expanding into rural lands and overwhelming small towns. Eiesland immersed herself into the changing religious institutions in the exurb of Dacula, Georgia. She found that, indeed, the rapid influx of newcomers into this rural community fostered restructuring within the "religious ecology." Religious institutions were redefined and their status in the community was rearranged, these local processes a direct result of urban deconcentration.[22] Drawing on organizational ethnographic methods, Eiesland looked at the interactions and relationships among the varied religious groups as "newcomers" and "old-timers" engaged each other. She found that the new chapter in the religious ecology provided multiple entry points for believers, and fostered "multilayered religious participation." While focusing on the religious ecology within the broader urban ecology, she was able to tease out the dynamic intersection of the two.

Omar McRoberts also utilized the frame of religious ecology within an urban ecology in his study of a particular neighborhood in Boston. In *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*,[23] he claims the strong theoretical influences of St. Clair Drake and Nancy Ammerman. While using dual ecologies as units of analysis can be confusing, he argues that they are deeply related, both having agency in shaping the other. McRoberts' immersive ethnographic study focused on a single neighborhood ("Four Corners") and the 29 faith communities within it, comprising what he calls a "religious district." His central research questions revolve around why there is such density of congregations, how they differ, and how they are engaging the neighborhood. Economic and social forces are largely responsible for the availability of affordable buildings for rent in poor neighborhoods like Four Corners. Having so many churches can contribute to discouraging economic development or retarding deterioration, but neither addresses poverty in the area. Looking at the differentiation of congregations, McRoberts found that this results not only from its spaces and ethnicities, but also from myriad

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world views, understandings of peoplehood, assimilation, the meanings attached to their immediate space, and agency to impact the world. Within these particular religious communities social capital is being generated, but to what end? McRoberts found that, for the most part, it was not directed toward impacting the neighborhood. Many of the members came from outside the neighborhood and the activist organizations that did advocate for social change often had goals that transcended the local community. In this ecological analysis, the urban context was more active in shaping the religious presence rather than a robust reciprocity.

One dimension where one could expect critical research on urban religion is in im/migration studies. Even a cursory look at the development of cities from antiquity onwards would recognize how newcomers from outside the city walls and from foreign shores impact their urban destinations. Im/migrants map cities by establishing a patchwork of communities, often anchored by a religious institution (such as described by McGreevy). Bringing diverse languages, cultures, and religions, they engage the dominant culture of their new context, both changing and being changed by it (as so richly described by Orsi). Immigration Studies has become established as a field, generating a growing community of scholars and production of research literature. However, until recently, very little of the focus in the field is on the religions of the im/migrants—the ways that it functions in building their collective identity and enables them to navigate and locate themselves. This was especially so for the wave of "new immigrants" coming to the US. As the numbers of those coming from European countries declined, the 1965 Immigration Act opened up the gates for newcomers from East and South Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America. The shift was dramatic, creating a new pluralism in the US, not only in terms of ethnicities but in the religions that they brought with them.

Sociologist R. Stephen Warner critiqued the lack of attention to the religions of the new immigrants and developed the New Ethnic and Immigration Project—a research project supported by the Lilly Endowment. With Judith G. Wittner, they directed ten ethnographic case studies in several large cities and co-edited *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*.[24] The number of chapters is limited, but the diversity of research sites is impressive—which included faith communities that were Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Rastafarian, with immigrants from China, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Iran, Jamaica, Yemen, and Mexico. The ethnographies are detailed descriptions of how faith functions in these groups in the development of their collective identities through building religious communities. Religious identity enables them to adapt to or resist the dominant culture of their new context, sometimes simultaneously. As they encounter new realities around social class, race, and gender, their meanings and practices are challenged and sometimes changed. Warner and Wittner draw out common themes from this diverse sample by first building in common questions for the research sites. They literally bookend *Gatherings in Diaspora* in an analytical introduction and conclusion by placing these very particular faith communities into the broader context of the globalization of production and the geo-politics of conflict. In 1998, they broke new ground and inspired a wave of research.

Building on Warner and Wittner's study, Helen Rose Ebaugh organized a research project that had a single-city focus in the South, a region not represented in the previous work. By focusing on 13 congregations of new immigrants in Houston, the Religion, Ethnicity and New Immigrant Research (RENIR) the research design enabled comparisons while holding constant the particular urban context. Through phone surveys, focus groups, studies of social service coalitions, and immersive ethnographic methodologies, detailed descriptions of both ethnic-specific and multi-ethnic congregations are presented in *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*,[25] published in 2000. The groups are richly varied, reflecting the changing demographics in the city: Vietnamese and Taiwanese Buddhists,

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Mexican Catholics and Protestants, Korean and Chinese Protestants, Argentinian Pentecostals, Pakistani Muslims and Zoroastrians, Greek Orthodox, South Indian Hindus, and two multi-ethnic congregations. In their analysis, Ebaugh and Chafetz expanded their attention beyond cultural production and identity, to the dynamics within the urban ecology. They found that fluctuations in the local economy (here, driven by the global oil market) had significant impacts on the congregations in their sample, including the location and plans for their buildings as well as the size and composition of their membership.[26] Local cultures also exert constraints as well as opportunities for those in minority religions or ethnic groups. But these groups were not just at the mercy of the urban context, which they also impacted. Their agency was reflected in an array of social services offered, which support adaptation and assimilation (through language instruction), and cultural identity reproduction (community centers), but also contribute to meeting basic human needs.

Since these two important studies, there have been other contributions to researching how religion is functioning among the new immigrants. A study of Filipino, Mexican, Salvadoran, Vietnamese, and Chinese faith communities in San Francisco, built on and pushed the ethnographic methodologies employed in the earlier studies. In *Religion at the Corner of Bliss and Nirvana: Politics, Identity, and Faith in New Migrant Communities*,[27] careful ethnographies were conducted in ten congregations representing various expressions of Buddhist and Christian traditions. However, they found that their research "leaked out" beyond the congregations, families, and social service sites they were studying. They followed their migrant subjects into the streets of San Francisco, listening to gang members, sex workers, juvenile detention centers. "Had we stayed within the walls of a religious site or remained bound to a congregational model, we would have missed the strong and vibrant religiosity expressed by these highly marginalized groups of migrants."[28] The researchers also followed their subjects in their dynamic relationships with their countries of origin, developing a transnational paradigm. They provide a granular look into the personal dimensions of globalization as migrants become "bilocal," through travel, economics, and politics. In some cases, the researchers themselves were bilocal. As with faith-based activism among Filipinos, the religious communities become the base for civic engagement and advocacy.

As cities are increasingly caught up in the many facets of globalization, transnationalism becomes a helpful paradigm in looking at understandings of citizenship. It considers not only the back-and-forth movement of people, but the movement of ideas, cultural values, goods, religious practices, and capital. This is captured in Alyshia Galvez's *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexican Immigrants*.[29] Her ethnographic research focuses on the devotion of Mexican immigrants in New York to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The transnationalism she found included a liturgical expression in the La Antorcha Guadalupana, a torch run from the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Further, the practices of Guadalupan devotion centered an understanding of "cultural citizenship" that is agential in producing activism and self-advocacy. She quotes Saskia Sassen, who refers to this political movement as a space with "micro architectures for global civil society." These works expand the perimeters of the "urban ecology," to incorporate the globalization of contemporary cities. Continuing in this vein of exploring the dynamics of transnationalism is a study of African faith communities in New York by Mark Gornick.[30]

The touchstones discussed so far in this brief history of the study of religion in the urban ecology have been from the North American context. However, even as the recent works cited above on the new immigrants to the US explore the complex dynamics of a "lived globalization" mediated through religion and ethnicity, so too has the field itself become more globalized. A recent volume of research by an international group of scholars advances the study of

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religion and cities significantly, both in terms of ethnographic research and offering theoretical infrastructure. Published in 2017, *Religion and the Global City*[31] builds on Saskia Sassen's frame of "global cities." Her focus was on New York, London, and Tokyo as "command centers" of the globalizing economy; the flow of capital was facilitated by transnational networks they and other global cities cultivated.[32] Sassen did not include religion in her analysis, but, as a leading urban theorist, her work has been influential among scholars of urban religion. Globalization has developed exponentially in the last 30 years, in a number of dimensions beyond economics; it has redefined culture, technology, media, politics, built environments, and the migration of peoples. Religion, too, has been impacted by globalization and in fact has been a conveyor of it—shaping and being shaped by the global context. So the approach in the 2017 volume of research moves beyond Sassen's political economy lens; rather, the analysis is "non-reductive … unpacking the interconnected role of religious and cultural flows in the making of global–local spaces which have taken different shapes in different urban contexts."[33]

Further, *Religion and the Global City* represents a corrective to Western-centric urban theory and research by focusing on global cities in the Global South as well as the Global North. The chapters include research coming out of such cites as Bangalore, Sao Paulo, Beijing, and Cape Town, as well as London, Paris, and Amsterdam. As the writers document, it is not just capital but immigrants, cultures, and religions that flow through these global cities, transcending territoriality and creating hyper-diversity. Religion becomes a basic unit of globalization, but its embodiment is also local. In fact, religions bear the intersection of global and local, a dynamic which is the focus of the researchers. These faiths that are both global and local are lived out in city spaces. Rather than the city encouraging the decline of religion, the opposite is occurring. As religious immigrants claim their faith identities in a dynamic marketplace and encounter other religions, a "post-secularity" can create tolerance of religions and cosmopolitanism, a kind of background "hum" or "white noise" in contemporary urban dynamics, argues Chris Baker.[34] *Religion and the Global City* represents the growth edge of the field of research in religion in the urban ecology that is continued in this collection.

Religion and Cities as a field

In 2007, Lowell Livezey organized an effort to get a program unit for Religion and Cities at the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Here would be a space that scholars from a variety of disciplines could be in robust and ongoing dialogue about the dynamic relationship between religions and their urban contexts. Lowell lived to see the first session of Religion and Cities, the fruition of his determined effort[35]. Since 2007, Religion and Cities has held annual paper sessions at the AAR with scholars (many of whom are included in this volume) contributing from a variety of academic disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, geography, architecture, urban planning, theology, and art. Dialogue has been furthered in co-sponsored sessions with Black Theology; Queer Studies; Religion and Film; Class, Religion, and Theology, among others. The ecological model at the theoretical center of Religion and Cities has been contested, expanded, and developed through multiple lenses throughout. Other projects have been inspired by the community of scholars who have connected through the hub at AAR, including the Center for the Study of Religion and Cities, based at Morgan State University and funded through the Luce Foundation. Of course, this volume is a result as well.

The purpose of highlighting the "touchstones" has been to trace the development of a central idea, and see how it has evolved over time with each generation of scholarship. This history of research on religion in the urban ecology as presented here is not comprehensive, but meant to give a general topography of its progress and to explore the research methodologies that

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emerge. The lineage contained within this history is not a report of unrelated research projects. Rather, what is seen is how research has built on, and often been in dialogue with, scholarship that has come before—to expand or challenge earlier works, rather than simply replicate. These links form a kind of "academic begets," or genealogy, which I have tried to draw out. For example, Omar McRoberts was influenced by the earlier research of St. Claire Drake, who was inspired by the work of W.E.B. DuBois. Nancy Ammerman cites H. Paul Douglass as a source of inspiration; Ammerman was a mentor to Nancy Eiesland and was an influence in Helen Rose Ebaugh's analysis. Ebaugh was also building on the work of Stephen Warner on new immigrants. Elfriede Wedam had worked closely with Lowell Livezey in the Religion in Urban America Program. Later, she and Paul D. Numrich continued to research the congregations in the original sample, but also expanded on the breadth and depth of faith communities in Chicago they studied, taking into account both the dynamics of globalization and hyper-diversity. In analyzing the impact religion had on the urban context in *Religion and Community in the New Urban America*, published in 2015, Numrich and Wedam conclude that it is part of an "ensemble of forces shaping the new metropolis."[36]

Livezey went on to found and direct the Ecologies of Learning Project to generate research in religiously diverse New York City from 2004 until his death in 2007. Three of the research fellows in that project, Richard Cimino, Nadia A. Mian, and Weishan Huang continued his research, published in *Ecologies of Faith in New York City: The Evolution of Religious Institutions* in 2013.[37] Through mixed research methods in Korean, African, Brazilian, Taiwanese, and Euro-descent communities, they too were looking at religious institutions in the processes of contextual change, whether cultural or economic.

It is a reflection of the intellectual genealogy of religion in cities that both of these last two volumes are dedicated to Lowell Livezey, and that Wedam and Cimino are contributors to this volume. Truly, no idea is an island, and no research stands alone.

Emerging research methodologies in the study of religion and cities

How then to study the complex and dynamic presence of religions in urban spaces? How to tease out what can be subtle and multivalent social processes, essentially synapses in the urban ecology? Clearly, some methods and approaches have emerged over time.

The early studies of religion in cities were conducted in Christian congregations, in the US, by academic sociologists (such as DuBois) and those affiliated with denominations and/or ecclesiastical institutions (Kincheloe, Douglass). Early researchers drew on survey data, as well as some ethnographic observation. Their dominant concern was on how im/migrants were changing the religious ecology: would predominantly white congregations survive? How did Black congregations reflect and/or reinforce segregated residential patterns?

As urban change accelerated in the last century, with economic restructuring and increasing engagement with the many facets of globalization, research methods also changed. Some research questions focused on how the restructuring occurring in cities and religious institutions might be related (Livezey, Eiseland). Here, analyses drew on other disciplines in developing a coherent narrative, including economics and organizational theory. As the field has evolved in the contexts of rapidly changing cities, it has become clear that it was necessarily becoming *multi-disciplinary*. Further, the sheer diversity of cities and the faith communities within them resisted a monolithic explanatory theory and publications have moved away from monographs to edited collections of many researchers, studying multiple faith communities, from multiple disciplines. For example, Lorentzen et al. describe the academic disciplines represented in the research team of *Religion at the Corner of Bliss and Nirvana*: psychology, sociology, political science,

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art history, communication studies, anthropology, and religious studies.[38] This intersection of fields means that theoretical insights from a broad assortment of literature can be brought to bear on understanding how the many moving parts of religions and cities are interacting.

With the increasing im/migration, religious diversity (hyper-diversity) flourished, meaning that research on religion in cities is necessarily *multi-faith*, reflecting the religious pluralism. In this regard, some research has focused on how the interaction among various religious groups affects religious identity, whether reinforcing tolerance or exclusivism. Scott Hanson's study of the hyper-diversity in Queens, New York, interrogated the limits of diversity in a dense human community. Although there were over 200 worshiping communities of a dizzying variety within 2.5 square miles, he found a surprisingly low level of social conflict, even with high differentiation.[39]

As described in the introduction, political geographer and urbanist Edward Soja of the LA School of Urbanism had adopted the view that urban space is socially constructed.[40] This idea had created a paradigm shift in virtually every discipline, he argued, as they made what he described as a "spatial turn."[41] This has certainly been the case here, as a third mark of emerging research is incorporating a *spatial approach* in looking at the interaction of religions and their urban contexts. Religion is not a decontextualized socio-cultural phenomenon but one that is lived out in the streets, sidewalks, buildings, and commercial spaces of cities. It also has agency in the production of the built environment. Not only are sacred spaces built that impact the aesthetics, identity, demographics, and local economy of an urban community; faith communities also occupy existing commercial buildings, affecting their viability and impacting the social capital of the local neighborhood. Further, religion is lived out and performed in the streets and at times "claims" public spaces, such as when Muslims spill out from Jummah prayers onto streets filled with vendors, or Catholic processions wind through neighborhoods, filling them with sound and color. Faith practices can also be limited and challenged by the physical context, such as when policies or cultural exclusivities prevent acquisition of buildings. In other words, religion cannot be seen as disembodied but *lived in relationship* to its physical space in cities. The spatial turn is increasingly apparent in research on religion and cities and is critical to any analysis of their interaction. Robert Orsi described the relationship between religion and space:

> These specific features of the urban (and perhaps post-urban) landscape, which differ from city to city, are not simply the setting for religious experience and expression but become the very materials for such expression and experience. City folk do not live *in* their environments; they live *through* them. Who am I? What is possible in life? What is good? These are questions that are always asked, and their answers discerned and enacted, in particular places. Specific places structure the questions, and as men and women cobble together responses, they act upon the spaces around them in transformative ways. This is the architectonic of urban religion.[42]

The expansion and acceleration of globalization is often described in economic terms, yet it is articulated in numerous dimensions, including technology, communication, cultures, climate, disease, and geo-politics, as well as the mobility of capital. There has always been an intimate relationship of religion and globalization through the propagation of faith traditions and movement of peoples are two different things. Missionaries have always gone to other countries and are different than group migration. As seen in the more recent examples of touchstones above, then, *globalization* becomes central to understanding the dynamics of religion and cities. Through increased mobility, driven by economic opportunities (or perception of), a "bilocalism"[43] or transnationalism is created which links geographically disparate places, facilitating pathways for

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the flow of cultures, values, religious practices, and ideas, as well as capital. Identities of place and person are fluid; meanings of citizenship, faith, and family are contested and reconstructed.

These four approaches to research on religion and cities are critical to emerging scholarship. Cities and religions are both dynamic and interactive. To better understand and describe this interaction of religion in the urban ecology, research should draw on a number of fields (interdisciplinary), focus on the religious pluralism of the context (multi-faith), expand its gaze to include the built environment (spatiality), and be attentive the flow of globalization. All of this, of course, has ramifications for research methodologies.

In an ecological approach, the researcher's focus is not just on religion itself or on a city where faith groups happen to be present. Rather, the focus is on the interaction between religions and context—the synapses, if you will; those exchanges of energy between the two which result in change and action. The research question, therefore, hones in on agency—who is acting on whom? What is being shaped in the encounter and what is shaping? The central question should focus and compel the researcher to drill deeply.

An early decision in the research process is to choose a unit of study that will provide the best examination of the religious presence in context. This could be a metropolitan area, such as Numrich and Wedam in their study of metropolitan Chicago,[44] or a single city such as in Ebaugh's choice of Houston for research on various new immigrant groups.[45] Neighborhoods as analytic units, generally understood as geographic spaces which are walkable, have the advantage of controlling for space—that is, there is a common experience of sharing the physical environment (even when groups can have very different meanings and experiences within it). McRoberts looked at the question of why poor neighborhoods have more faith communities, and so focused on a particular neighborhood in Boston as the best context to capture observations.[46] This author studied the varieties of religious engagement along a single street in Philadelphia that ran through several neighborhoods.[47] Within these geographical units, organized communities of faith are then the subjects of study. Researchers must also define not only the geographical boundaries of study but the definition of "communities of faith," "congregations," "religious institutions," or "religious gatherings." There are some commonalities across research projects, but no set standard.

Another approach is to study a particular question, but using a multi-city sample (such as by Ammerman[48] as well as Warner and Wittner in their study of new immigrants).[49] The advantage, of course, is that you can compare the same phenomenon in different locations. However, coordinated multi-city samples usually require large research grants. Collected volumes of research such as this one are usually multi-city (and with cities around the globe represented) and gather diverse research projects between two covers. These make developing theoretical constructs more challenging than in a coordinated study, even with multiple sites.

Most scholars study religious engagement by going to recognized congregations, mosques, temples, gurdwaras, or other spaces of faith gatherings. However, how is religion expressed in non-religious spaces? Sociologist Courtney Bender conducted ethnographic research among volunteers in a non-profit agency that provided meals for those people living with AIDS who were homebound. She did not ask about religious beliefs or practices but listened and observed to see how faith might be related to volunteer activity. Her work offers unique insight into the religious agency in the urban ecology transmitted through the lived religion of individual practitioners. By "de-centering religion" she was able to see how it "happens" in a plethora of ways.[50] In a later edited volume, Bender, with colleagues Wendy Cadge, Peggy Levitt, and David Smilde, argues for research methodologies that explore non-faith spaces in order to tease out the ways religion is engaging social contexts.[51] Here in this volume, the research on cosmopolitanism in Mumbai by István Keul employs a de-centered approach as he waited for religion to come up

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as his interlocutors reflected on multicultural pluralism. As he writes here, this expanded his field of perception and curiosity; finally, he found that religion was difficult to isolate from other sources of identity.

Conversely, there are studies that not only focus directly on religious communities but on a singular ritual as a portal into understanding religious agency and the impact of space on meanings and practices. Orsi's examination of the festival of the Madonna in Harlem among Italian immigrants unpacks a complex dynamic embodied in a singular devotional ritual. It becomes a source of connecting with history, reinforcing identity, generating social capital, location of the self, empowerment, and claiming of urban space.[52] Twenty-five years later, Galvez employed a similar research design, focusing on the devotional practices of Mexican immigrants in New York around the procession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her analysis revealed how transnationalism is lived out, as well as how it impacts understandings of citizenship and the consequential social actions of the practitioners.

Units of analysis vary and are directly related to the research question(s) being pursued. They are also related to the research methods chosen in designing a study of religion in urban ecologies. What follows are some methodological elements that have emerged in the field over time, and especially in the most recent surge in research in this area. This is not intended as a how-to guide. In fact, another edited volume in this series of Routledge Handbooks in Religion goes in depth on the mechanics of a variety of research methods as well as theoretical considerations.[53]

A comprehensive study of the dynamics of religion in cities will be multi-disciplinary. If working with a research team, representation from a variety of academic disciplines will bring other lenses to the study. However, even the single researcher will need to draw on other fields and skills. Because of the pace of urban change and restructurings, it is important to provide an historical background for the geographic unit being studied. Most of the studies surveyed in this chapter begin with a description of the context, drawn from archival research. In order to understand the present it is critical to know what came before. History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes—an insight attributed to Mark Twain. For example, Hanson found that the tolerance among the dense religious diversity in Flushing, NY, was resonant of the Flushing Remonstrance of 1657, a foundational document of religious freedom, yet not in the consciousness of the new neighbors.[54] Understanding the history of a context is especially important in the study of religion, because central to the very project of religion is holding memory and ritually linking believers to the past, which counters so many of the social and economic forces that deny or expunge memory. As memory is performed in religious practice, it can be changed over time. This makes it essential to both understand the "facts" of history as well as the way they are carried by religion.

In providing a context for a current study, additional data beyond the history is also helpful in setting the stage for a particular study. Quantitative data can help describe the context of the unit of study, especially demographic information on the population over time. How have the complexions and accents heard changed in recent years? What trends can be seen in education levels, income/poverty, occupation/unemployment, and health indicators? What is the nature of housing and how is that changing—proportions of owned or rented, condition, apartments or single-family structures, etc.? How are crime rates trending? What are the major institutions and interests affecting the local economy? However, when using census data, one should acknowledge that many groups (e.g., homeless people, immigrants, the poor) are undercounted. Whether studying one religious group or practice, or a number within the unit of analysis, it is essential to provide a rich description of the context—its history, demographics, and spatial context. Many studies also include maps in establishing the context, which are helpful in visualizing the geographic space, with the communities of faith under study plotted.

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In designing a research project, a critical decision is whether to use quantitative or qualitative approaches … or a combination of the two. Quantitative data can measure particular impacts of religion that can be measured—such as how a proliferation of religious institutions correlates with changes in crime or property values, for example. Surveys can capture beliefs, values, and practices for a larger sample that might be generalizable. One quantitative approach especially employed by sociologist Ram Cnaan is to calculate the social value of a religious institution in monetary terms. In his study for Partners for Sacred Places ("The Halo Effect"), 54 variables representing the contributions of an urban congregation are aggregated to a final sum of its contribution to its context. Variables include the most obvious (local businesses patronized, individuals employed) to monetizing the intangibles of improving quality of life through helping people find jobs, partnerships, recreation, and mental health. Even the contribution of having trees on the property is calculated—how they impact air quality, temperature, real estate values, etc.[55] While this might seem an extreme form of quantitative methodology, the value of quantitative methods is that they often expose anomalies and areas for deeper exploration.

For example, in his quantitative survey of immigrant religion, Philip Connor presents data that indicate that across all faith traditions, new immigrants attended services less frequently after settling in the US than they did in their own country.[56] This contrasts with other, mostly ethnographic, studies that describe how religious practices and identity are intensified among new immigrants. So this raises a number of questions for exploration. What is going on here? Is the bigger picture captured in the quantitative data different than the particular experiences of faith communities studied more closely? Is worship attendance the best indicator of religious identity? Are other dynamics at work (such as the density of religious pluralism, or the presence of ethnic associations in the community, or a cultural climate of hostility or tolerance)? Quantitative data often directs the researcher to drill down into other areas of exploration.

Ethnographic research famously gets us to the "thick description," as developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in 1973.[57] That is to say, the researcher does not simply record events, behaviors and practices, but explores the complex dynamics of relationship to context and the interpretation of meanings offered by interlocutors. Keen observation is best accomplished from the inside of culture, rather than looking in from the outside. The primary ethnographic methodology is immersion in a context over time as participant-observer. The value of ethnographic research is that one case is understood very well; its limitation is that it is not generalizable to a larger population but can only be suggestive of dynamics in other contexts. In larger studies and collected volumes, such as this one and others described earlier, multiple focused ethnographic studies can be brought into dialogue with one another. For a variety of reasons, the ethnographic approach has become the preferred methodology in studying religion in cities. This comes out of a recognition of the sheer diversity and dynamism of global cities and the religions in them that resist the development of explanatory meta theories. This has also emerged out of the post-modern critique of positivism and turn toward subjectivity. "Objectivity" is finally not possible; the researcher's perception is not outside of the realities being observed, untouched by them. Rather, only by participating in a context can one come to understand it.

Ethnographic research is finally relational in practice. In coming into a community as researcher, the very entrée is a process to be consciously navigated. In order for honest and insightful conversations to occur, there has to be a level of trust that is extended, and cannot be presumed. There are lots of reasons for potential informants to be distrustful of a researcher, particularly suspicions about academics furthering careers through writing about the experience of others and coming from a different class status. The researcher, therefore, has to be conscious of their social location and sensitive to how they are being perceived. Are they seen as an insider or an outsider? That is, do they share the religion, ethnicity, and social location of the community

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being studied? The value of shared background is that entrée is greatly facilitated and trust more easily extended. Also, an insider can understand the nuances of language and cultural dynamics. On the other hand, there is value in being an outsider, even though it might take longer to establish trust. An outsider can observe things that insiders might miss because they are so much a part of the familiar fabric. Outsiders can ask questions about language, behaviors, and beliefs that are taken for granted by members of a community. One model has been to have research teams of two—an insider and an outsider—to have the benefit of both perspectives.[58]

Ethnographic research, done well, is immersive over time (which can mean months or years). The researcher participates in the life of the community, which might mean attending worship, working in social service programs, going to meetings, "hanging out" in the community and patronizing its businesses, sharing meals, going to fairs and festivals, and having many conversations throughout, in both formal and informal interviews. The immersed ethnographer will know well the spatial and cultural environment being studied. Hanson wrote of his research in Flushing that, eventually, he "knew every part of every street at every time of day and night."[59] The goal is to understand the experience of people within their context, to see the world through their eyes. But this is not to say that the researcher *becomes* the other (the old trope within anthropology of "going native" is often overdrawn) but understands their experience as lived. In participant observation, the researcher will need to direct attention to the issue of the boundary of self. At what point in immersion does the researcher risk losing perspective?

There is a balance: as much as the researchers are participants, they are also observers. The discipline of ethnographic research is to maintain a perspective on what is going on. This is best done through writing field notes immediately after every day in the field, or event. In comprehensive field notes, the researcher records everything they remember without concern for style or spelling. Everything should be considered data when looking at religion in the urban ecology—e.g., the sights, sounds, and smells of the street, how people are dressed, the type of music heard, the taste of food, the gender roles in activities, etc. Informal conversations should be recalled as closely as possible. Attention should be paid to the absences and silence as well: what is not being said? A final key element of field notes is self-reflection, that is, one's own experience of the field, including emotions and assumptions that were exposed. This recognizes the inter-subjectivity of ethnographic research: both researcher and informants/interlocutors are subjects and impacted in the encounter. Over time, themes will become apparent in field notes: recurring language patterns, conflicts, framing of grievances and resources. Of course, this is greatly facilitated by having common questions across interviews in a single site or across sites. In analyzing field notes and designated interviews, more formalized coding (perhaps through ethnographic software) will enable the relationships, themes, and trends to become clearer. But even in writing field notes, anomalies as well as currents will become apparent, leading the researcher to deeper questioning.

Perspective is also maintained through engaging with other researchers (even if not part of a team), as well as with the community of scholars in the area of interest. Reading in the field as well as communication not only helps to nurture perspective but addresses the very real possibility of isolation. Research can be lonely … but it does not have to be.

There are multitudinous resources available in skill development in all aspects of ethnography including entrée, interviewing, and focus groups, field notes, coding, discourse analysis, etc. Of course, during a pandemic shutdown, face-to-face ethnography becomes difficult if not impossible. There is a growing number of resources online for conducting ethnographic research remotely such as on Sage Ocean.[60] Through creative use of technology, ethnographers can recruit participants, observe gatherings, conduct interviews, have the audio transcribed, and code the transcripts. Although interruptions such as the shutdown present challenges for

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all human interaction, including religion and cities, ethnographers have found creative ways to conduct research. In fact, in the midst of seismic change, research is all the more needed.

It is often said that ethnography is finally more an art than a skill. As there has been a proliferation of research on religion in the urban ecology in recent years, the research methods themselves are becoming more artistic. Photographs are much more prevalent now, a methodology discussed in this volume by Roman Williams and Timothy Shortell. Williams also edited a book on *Seeing Religion: Toward a Visual Sociology of Religion*.[61] In her chapter here, Rupa Pillai describes using GIS (Geographical Information System) in spatially mapping urban religions—in this case, Caribbean Hinduism through their religious flags (*jhandis*). James Edmunds in his chapter engages the spatiality of religion by interrogating traditional understandings of urban space and introducing the possibility of "ephemeral cities." He is also working on a book on "religion and smell."

Cities and religions are changing, independently and in relationship. As the study of faiths in the urban ecology continues to try to capture those elusive synapses between city and religion that reciprocally shape each other, so too are new methodologies emerging. As the field becomes more multi-disciplinary, incorporating dynamics of globalization and religious pluralism, and turning its analytical gaze to a more spatial orientation, new voices are coming to the project. Many of those voices, who are also bringing new methodologies, are present in this volume. We hope this collection further inspires an emerging generation of scholarship on religion and cities.

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