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Religious and Denominational Problems in Nevada

Introduction

Ever since the earliest civilizations, humans have sought to make sense of their relationship with other beings, the universe, and the unknown through religious beliefs and practices. Shamans and healers interpreted phenomena for their followers, nuns cared for the sick and dying, ministers spearheaded anti-slavery movements, and religious activists joined campaigns for prison reform, worked for charitable organizations, and promoted novel educational institutions. Mother Theresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Dalai Lama and other world leaders with strong religious convictions have shown us what love in action means

At the same time, religious persecution and wars have cost humanity countless lives, as religious fanatics engaged in witch hunts and persecuted "heretics" and unfaithful. This dark side of religion is evident today in conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, Israelis and Palestinians, Shiites and Sunnis. Sexual abuse among clergy widely reported in recent years have spotlighted the problems besetting religious institutions, while bitter disputes between the Religious Right and the Religious Left have reminded us that religion is not always a constructive force in society. Furthermore, blurring the line separating church and state causes serious problems

This chapter focuses on the place of religion in contemporary society and the role it plays in the state of Nevada. It should be noted that it is easier to measure religion in terms of places of worship and membership counts provided by annual reports than in less apparent indicators of spirituality. While this survey is constrained by the relative paucity of data, an attempt will be made to describe religious institutions and practices in Nevada, illuminate its weaknesses and strengths, and identify faith community resources in the key regions of the Silver State. The term "denomination" is used here to refer to a group of religious congregations with similar faith traditions and a common organization.

Historical Overview

According to the data compiled by the **World Christian Encyclopedia (2001)** and **National & World Religions Statistics** web site, <http://adherents.com/>, the five most populous religious groups in the world today are (1) Christianity, (2) Islam, (3) Secular/nonreligious/agnostic/ atheist, (4) Hinduism, and (5) Chinese folk religionists. However, a word to the wise found in **TheNew Encyclopedia Britannica (2002)** is worth heeding: "The classification of religions that will withstand all criticism and serve all the purposes of a general science of religions has not been devised."

Christianity is the largest religious group in the world with an estimated 2 billion adherents or 33% of the world population (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson, 2001). For over a thousand years, the center of gravity for global Christianity has been in Europe . During the past 100 years, however, Christianity has experienced a major growth in other parts of the world. Christians from Africa , Asia , and Latin America are now fast becoming the majority. By 2050, the estimated top ten Christian countries will be: USA, China, Brazil, Congo-Zaire, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Ethiopia, and Uganda (Johnson, 2005).

Islam is the second largest religious group with an estimated 1.2 billion adherents or 19.6% (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson, 2001), with the Shiites and the Sunnis being the most sizable Muslim groups. By 2050, 25% of the world population will be Muslim. The projected top Muslim countries at that time will be Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Yemen, and Afghanistan (Johnson, 2005).

Secular/nonreligious/agnostic/atheists form the third largest group, estimated to be at 1.1 billion or 17.7%. Secular humanism, deism, pantheism, freethought, and other kindred philosophies may be included in this category. The editors at <http://adherents.com/> point out that "Sociologically speaking, 'nonreligious' people are simply those who derive their worldview and value system primarily from alternative, secular, cultural or otherwise nonrevealed systems ('religions') rather than traditional religious systems." Several factors make estimating the size and the spread of this group

difficult. A list of the top 10 countries with largest numbers of atheists/agnostics consists of: China, Japan, Russia, Vietnam, Germany, France, USA, Britain, South Korea, and Canada (Zuckerman, 2005).

Hinduism is the fourth largest religious group in the world with nearly 900 million followers or 14% (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson, 2001). It is also one of the fastest growing groups in the US. The top 10 largest national Hindu populations, according to Ash, are India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Malaysia, USA, Mauritius, South Africa and United Kingdom (Ash, 1997).

Chinese folk religionists normally include Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, traditional non-scriptural/local practices and beliefs and are estimated at 385 million or 6% (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson, 2001). Two generations ago, Taoism was one of the largest and strongest institutions in China. However, since the Cultural Revolution, its influence has waned due largely to the destruction of its temples and clergy. The **Britannica Book of the Year** (2002) lists over 6 million Confucianists who currently live mostly outside of China.

Religions in the United States

The U.S. is one of the most religiously diverse countries.

- According a Gallop Poll, 90% of Americans responded that they believe in God, 5% were not sure, and 4% did not believe in God (Gallup Poll, 2004).
- A Pew Forum poll suggests that 70% of Americans consider it important for presidential candidates to be strongly religious (The Pew Forum, 2000). Also, after Sept. 11, 78% say that religious influence in American life is growing (The Pew Forum, 2001), but are also sharply divided whether religious groups should become directly involved in politics (The Pew Forum, 2004).

There is definitely a growing interest in regard to the relationship between faith and political, social, and economic issues, as well as in the scientific study of religion and efficacy of prayer. Still, the

decade of the 90's was marked by a decline in institutional membership. In 2001, the **American Religious Identification Survey** polled 50,281 households in 48 states, asking respondents "*What is your religion, if any?*" The following are some key findings concerning the changes in religious life between 1990 and 2001:

- The percentage of Americans who classify themselves as "Christian" declined from 86% to 77%.
- Non-Christian religious groups increased membership from about 5.8 million to 7.7 million.
- The number of respondents asserting that they do not subscribe to any religious faith rose from 14.3 million to 29.4 million (8% to 14% respectively).
- It should be noted, also, that the rate of refusal to answer questions about religion during the 1990's rose from 2.3% to 5.4%

The ARIS survey has shown that both the "non-religious or secular" Americans and the Pentecostal/charismatic congregations are increasing in number. Researchers also observed that women and older Americans were more likely to describe their outlook as "religious." Compared to Asian Americans, African Americans were least likely to describe themselves as "secular." Assessing any data on religious identity, one should bear in mind that this is a complex phenomenon, and that it is often difficult to draw lines between religion, race, ethnic culture, and national origins (Kosmin, Mayer, Keysar, 2001).

The *Religious Congregations & Membership* (2000) published by the Roman Catholic Glenmary Home Missioners is a major national study on religious "adherents" (i.e., all members, their children, and estimated number of other participants not considered members). Out of 285 religious bodies originally invited to participate, 149 responded in a survey sponsored by the **Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies** (2002). The researchers caution that not every religious group chooses, or is able to, participate in this survey. The historically African American denominations, Baptist Bible Fellowship, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Brethren, and a few others decline to take part in the

study. Nonetheless, the data is revealing. A breakdown of the participating groups and their estimated adherents is as follows:

- Protestant – 66 million
- Roman Catholic – 62 million
- Jewish – 6 million
- LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) – 4 million
- Muslim – 1.6 million
- Eastern Christians (including Orthodox) – 1 million
- Eastern religions – 150,000 (although many do not have formal membership in local congregations, so the figures are not completely comparable to other religious groups)
- Unitarian Universalist Association – 180,000

Religious Life in Nevada

The information below highlights the religious affiliations of Nevadans and religious life in the Silver State:

- Christian (78%), Other Religions (2%), and Nonreligious (20%) (Wikipedia, 2006).
- Nevada is among the least religious western states in the nation, according to the number of people disclaiming any religious beliefs: Washington (25%), Oregon (21%), Colorado (21%), Wyoming (20%), and Nevada (20%) (Gallup Poll, 2006).

For a small state like Nevada, though, the numbers are still noteworthy:

- ARDA – the **Association of Religion Data Archives (2000)** lists some 500 congregations and 60 denominations in the 17 Nevada counties (see Supplementary Materials).
- In 2000, Clark County had the highest number of congregations (487), followed by Washoe (152), Elko (45), Nye (41), Carson City (33), Lyon (31), Douglas (27), Churchill (19), Lander (8), Humboldt (18), White Pine (18), Mineral (15), Lincoln (14), Pershing (10), Eureka (5), Storey (3), Esmeralda (2).

- In 2000, Roman Catholic Church had the highest number of adherents with 331,844, and 67 congregations. Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints had 116,925 adherents and 282 congregations. Jewish denominations (includes secular Jews) counted 77,100 among its followers and 23 houses of worship. Southern Baptist Convention listed 40,233 members and 111 congregations. And Assemblies of God report 22,691 members who attended 56 congregations.

With their conservative theology and determined recruitment efforts, Pentecostals are the fastest growing denomination in the U.S., followed by "Nondenominational churches," Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS), Southern Baptist, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Liberal religious institutions, on the other hand, have experienced a sharp decline in membership. For example, the United Church of Christ was down 2.38% in 2004-2005 (NEWS from the National Council of Churches, 2006).

The situation in Nevada mirrors the national trends, and as the following overview suggests, even the smaller denominations in the Silver State show religious verve and volunteer spirit.

African Americans and Civil Rights

Produced by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and other federal agencies, the project titled "We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement" documents significant national historical landmarks. Two of these are in Nevada – a church and a hotel. The Bethel AME Church in Reno was a center for religious, social, and political life of the African American community, beginning in the 1910's when black settlers had found their way to the region, and later on during the civil rights activism of the 1960's. African Americans were restricted in housing and employment opportunities. They could not enter white casinos nor be served in white restaurants. In Las Vegas, The Moulin Rouge was called the nation's first major interracial hotel. Prior to its opening on May 24, 1955, black entertainers performing in Las Vegas were denied access to the casino. Although short-lived, the Moulin Rouge had the lasting impact (We Shall Overcome). Much has changed

over time, as one can glean from celebrations during the black history month events in Clark and Washoe counties, even though not all habits of the past have fallen by the wayside. To date, there are over 120 African American churches in Las Vegas and Reno.

First Female Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

In June 2006 the Episcopal Bishop of Nevada, Katharine Jefferts Schori, became the Presiding Bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. She is the first woman elected to the top position in the church's nearly 400-year history. Katharine Jefferts Schori will assume her new office on November 1, 2006 (Episcopal News Service, 2006). When asked by TIME magazine what her priority would be as head of the U.S. church, she replied: "Our focus needs to be on feeding people who go to bed hungry, on providing primary education to girls and boys, on healing people with AIDS, on addressing tuberculosis and malaria, on sustainable development" (Chu, 2006).

Paiute Spirituality

Paiute are comprised by two groups, both linked to the Numic arm of the Uto-Aztecan family. The Northern Paiute occupied eastern California, western Nevada, and southeast Oregon. Their language is Shoshonean. Southern Paiute migrated to the Colorado River basin, Mojave desert in northern Arizona, southeast California, southern Nevada, and southern Utah during 1100 – 1200 C.E. (Paiute). The Great Basin tribes often visit their reservation Indian Health Service clinic, and after that move toward spiritually based healing and treatment practices (Wewa, personal communication, 2004). There is a good deal of distrust towards the federal government among Paiutes, reflecting the low quality of health care in the area, isolation, poverty, historical trauma, and preference for community values and family structure. While many Paiutes have joined various churches, some practice their spirituality on an individual basis.

Muslim Peace Initiatives

In 2004, Turkish-Muslims in Northern Nevada formed the **Sierra Foundation** to promote interfaith dialogue and work together towards world peace. The Foundation takes active part in interfaith dinners, volunteers at the food bank, and offers seminars on topics like "Jesus in the Holy Quran," "Women in Islam," "Preventing Another September 11." The community members celebrate earth day, issue press releases condemning terrorism, and sponsor interfaith trips to Turkey.

Wiccan Symbol

Despite a year of delay, the late Sgt. Patrick Stewart will finally have his religious symbol installed on his grave. Stewart was Wiccan and his wife had been petitioning the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to recognize the Wiccan symbol (5 star with a circle). Over the years, the VA had approved the use of some 30 different religious emblems, including atheist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and others. Nevada National Guard Sgt. Stewart died in Afghanistan in September 2005 when his Chinook helicopter was shot down. He was posthumously awarded the Air Medal, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Nevada Distinguished Service Medal, and the Combat Action Badge. Sgt. Stewart was born in Reno, he attended Washoe county schools, and served in Desert Storm. On September 13, 2006, the state officials approved the installation of the symbol on his plaque at the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Fernley, Nevada (Miller, 2006; Whaely, 2006).

Religion and Voting Preferences

At the eve of the 2004 presidential election, **Beliefnet**, presented the "Twelve Tribes of American Politics" (2004) report by Green and Waldman designed to illuminate the complex layers and stripes of the partisan politics among the Religious Right and the Religious Left. The project managers used the data from the **Fourth National Survey on Religion and Politics** (2004). Interestingly, both extremes are almost exactly the same in size, although the Religious Right with its superior organization has had a greater impact on political and social life in America for the past 25 years.

Sixty nine percent of this group voted in 2004 compared to fifty one percent in 2000 (Green and Waldman, 2004).

The Religious Left increased from 11% in 2000 to 14% in 2004. The researchers tie this group's support for Kerry to his stance on the Iraq War. George W. Bush showed the most improvement among the "Heartland Culture Warriors" (mainline Protestants and Catholics with traditional beliefs and practices). Members of this group viewed gay marriage and abortion as social issues central to the 2004 national election. These issues also helped the U.S. President gain ground among the more traditional Latinos and black churches (Green and Waldman, 2004).

In this day and age, candidates have to reckon with the fact that majority of American voters have strong religious ties and have diverse religious opinions concerning political, social, economic, and following Sept. 11, foreign policy issues.

Here are the "Twelve Tribes" identified by Green and Waldman in their report:

- **Religious Right** – 15% of voters. This group is strongly Republican, theologically conservative, and pro-life. Its members oppose gay marriage or civil union, give their strong support to Israel, and endorse the religious organizations' political engagement. 88% of respondents identifying with this group voted for Bush in 2004, while 12% voted for Kerry.
- **Heartland Culture Warriors** – 14% of voters. This group includes conservative Catholics and mainline Protestants, as well as members of the Church of the Latter-day Saints, who tend to be slightly less orthodox than the religious right, who regularly go to church (three quarters report attending worship service weekly or more often), support traditional marriage, and pay close attention to economic and foreign policy issues. In 2004, 72% voted for Bush and 28% voted for Kerry.
- **Moderate Evangelicals** – 9% of voters. These are primarily white evangelical protestants who follow less orthodox customs (35% go to church weekly or more often), see themselves as born-again Christians, and take a pro-life, pro-war, and anti-gay rights stance. They tend to place a greater

emphasis on foreign policy and economic issues (61% would fund more anti-poverty programs by taxing the rich). 64% voted for Bush and 36% voted for Kerry.

- **White Bread Protestants** – 7% of voters. This group consists of Protestant “mainline” churches such as United Methodist, Presbyterian Church in the USA, Episcopal Church, and United Church of Christ whose members are more politically moderate and less likely to identify with the Republican Party. About one-quarter report regular church attendance and some 47% agree that “all the world’s great religions are equally true and good.” People with this religious-political orientation take a pro-choice stance, support civil unions or same sex marriage, and care a lot about economic problems. 58% voted for Bush, 42% voted for Kerry.
- **Convertible Catholics** – 7% of voters. The core of this group is comprised by the white Catholic individuals who outnumber conservative Catholics by nearly two to one. Rather moderate in their orientation, members of this “tribe” are considered to be “swing voters.” Nearly half claim to attend worship on a weekly basis; 52% believe that “all the world’s great religions are equally true and good”; half give priority to economy issues and advocate moderate foreign policy. 55% voted for Bush, 45% voted for Kerry.
- **Religious Left** – 14% of voters. These are typically liberal Catholics and mainline and evangelical Protestants who are not particularly church bound (less than one-quarter report weekly worship attendance and pluralistic in beliefs). Two-thirds agree that “all the world’s great religions are equally true and good”; nearly half favor same-sex unions and 29% civil unions; 77% are pro-choice on abortion; a majority opposes the war in Iraq and stress social and economic issues. 70% voted for Kerry, 30% voted for Bush.
- **Spiritual but not Religious** – 3% of voters. People with this profile are marked by a strong spiritual beliefs (85% believe in God and more than half are sure about life after death). They do not necessarily sport a formal religious affiliation (a majority seldom or never attends worship services), take a liberal stance on economic issues, foreign policy, and abortion,

but 58% favor traditional marriage. 47% are 35 or younger. 63% voted for Kerry, 37% voted for Bush.

- **Seculars** – 11% of voters comprised of non-religious, atheistic, or agnostic individuals who are concerned mainly with social issues (83% are pro-choice and 59% favor same-sex marriage). Individuals with this orientation are liberal on foreign policy and moderate on economics. Nearly half are younger than 35. 74% voted for Kerry, 26% voted for Bush.
- **Latinos** – 5% of voters. The majority are Catholic, though the group includes a sizable Protestant minority. Over half report attending worship once a week or more often. 60% of the Catholics accept papal infallibility and 58% of the Protestants are biblical literalists. 59% oppose abortion or gay marriage. Economic issues are accentuated by individuals who fall into this category. Cultural views tend to be conservative. 55% voted for Kerry, 45% voted for Bush.
- **Jews** – 3% of voters. This is a group with a strong democratic leaning whose members are very keen on foreign policy issues and who strongly support Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians – a stance similar to the one taken by the Religious Right adherents, although Jewish voters oppose the involvement of religious organizations in politics and mistrust politicians eager to discuss their faith in public. 73% voted for Kerry, 27% voted for Bush.
- **Muslims & other faiths** (Buddhists, Hindus, Wiccans) – 3% of voters. Muslims are generally conservative on social issues like gay marriage, and they pay close attention to the economy and foreign policy. 77% voted for Kerry; 23% voted for Bush.
- **Black Protestants** – 8% of voters. Individuals in this group are conservative in their religious practice (59% report attending worship once a week or more) and belief (56% are biblical literalists). However, the experience of slavery and segregation has engendered a distinctive theology among the adherents. The group is strongly democratic, yet conservative on social issues (72% support traditional marriage and 54% are pro-life on abortion), supportive of the President's faith-based initiative, concerned about the economy, and

comfortable with the political involvement of religious organizations. 83% voted for Kerry and 17% voted for Bush

Commenting on the link between religion and politics, Green observes that since 1992, Evangelical Protestants have grown 8% more Republican, whereas Mainline Protestants have moved in the opposite direction, with 8% shifting toward Democrats. Overall, Catholics showed a small shift toward the Republican Party led by a steady movement of Traditional Catholics, whereas the Modernist Catholics have shifted toward the Democrats. Latino Catholics and Jews have shifted to the left, becoming strongly affiliated with the Democratic Party, although this finding must be viewed with caution due to the small number of relevant cases in the survey. There was a 6% decline in Democratic affiliation among Black Protestants but overall, the group still remained a key part of the Democratic constituency (see table 3 in the Supplementary Materials).

Religious Issues

Public Schools

In Henderson, Nevada, Valedictorian Brittany McComb's graduation speech was cut short. Her microphone went dead after she resorted to strong religious language, even though prior to the event, she was admonished not to do so. Miss McComb, who graduated with a 4.7 GPA at Foothill High School, defended her action as freedom of speech (Planas, 2006). In 1962, the Supreme Court banned state-sponsored school prayers. Students may organize extra curricular activities such as Bible clubs or prayer groups on school property before or after school but school officials are not allowed to promote or take part in organizing these activities. Although teaching about religion is permitted in principle, it remains a point of contention how to insure that the bible curriculum is objective and neutral. Some high schools have developed an elective course in world religion, bible in history, scripture as literature, and religious influences in art, music, and social studies. This way, the content is open to approval by the curriculum committee and the students can learn about religion and the role it has played in the development of culture without fearing proselytism. Private religious speech is allowed but the use of religious language in public speeches is

prohibited because it is incompatible with the mandatory nature of certain public events.

Intelligent Design

Mandatory teaching of creationism alongside the biological theory of evolution is another issue that has moved to the forefront of public debate in recent years. The issue is whether a teaching favored by religion but having no scientific credentials should be taught in science classes. The answer to this question depends, in part, on the stance one takes regarding the separation of church and state. Proponents of intelligent design argue that it is only fair to teach two theories about the origin of life, for living things are far too complex to be reduced to chance and spontaneous evolution. Hence the need to learn in school how to critically examine evolution. Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly adds that “forty-five percent of Americans say they believe in creationism, and President Bush has said he’d like to see it taught alongside evolution” (Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, 2001). A Pew Research survey reveals a comparable percentage of the public who accept the idea that humans evolved over time but that roughly two-thirds favor adding creationism to the school curriculum (Reading the Polls on Evolution and Creationism, 2005). Are evolution and intelligent design compatible? Francis Collins, scientist and director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, believes it is. As a devout Bible-believing Christian, he asserts that God used the mechanism of evolution and further states that he has no difficulty in reconciling science, which tells us how things work, and faith, which explains why we are here (Sheahen, 2006). Even so, teaching intelligent design as science in public schools is a highly contentious issue.

Sex education

Many religious conservatives believe that sex education classes should not dwell on issues like contraceptives but focus exclusively on abstinence.

- Over the past 5 years, the government has spent more than \$800 million on programs that are almost exclusively abstinence oriented. Columbia University researchers,

however, found that among teenagers who take “virginity pledges,” 88% will eventually engage in premarital sex (Connolly, 2004).

- Misconceptions also abound in the abstinence-only sex ed programs. For instance, some of the curriculum materials erroneously assert that “HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, can be spread via sweat and tears,” that “condoms fail to prevent HIV transmission as often as 31 percent of the time in heterosexual intercourse,” and that as many as 10% of those who have an abortion become sterile (Connolly, 2004).

Faith-based Initiatives

President George W. Bush insisted that the faith-based initiative “levels the playing field” for religious organizations seeking federal funding. Through the streamlining of applications and reporting procedures, regulatory changes, and provision of technical assistance, federal agencies are able to reach out to religious organizations to provide social and educational services. Congress and the Administration continue to struggle to find the balance between expansion of high quality services and the separation of church and state. One concern is whether the church receiving federal funding loses its prophetic role in so far as it might be unable to criticize the grantor. On the liberal side, the fear is twofold: (a) while dispensing public services, churches place themselves in an advantageous position as proselytizers looking for converts; (b) if the right wing evangelicals and the black churches are given most of the grants, the left wing religious groups will be at a distinct disadvantage.

Withdrawal of Life Sustaining Treatment

The complex case of Terri Schiavo has polarized the right to life and the right to die activists around the nation. Catholic directives state that a person may forego extraordinary or disproportionate means of preserving life. According to Richard McCormick, S.J., withdrawal of forced feeding to terminally ill patients is *not killing* but *allowing to die*. However, in 2004, the Pope said that it is morally obligatory to provide artificial nutrition and hydration even to those in persistent vegetative states. Muslims believe that we live and die according to

the will of Allah, which some interpret to mean that when treatment carries no prospect of cure, it ceases to be mandatory. The Jewish Orthodox are against the withdrawal of life support once treatment has been introduced because hastening or causing the death of a patient is tantamount to murder. Hindus and Buddhists link suffering to karma, yet many believe that when someone is dying, foregoing treatment is better than prolonging the dying process. Regardless of their religious convictions, most Americans agree that having a written advance health care directive is the best way to honor the dying person's wishes. In cases of ethical dilemmas where family members and/or providers are in irreconcilable conflict, it would be best to consult an impartial ethics committee and initiate a fair process of conflict resolution that takes into account the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research (ESCR)

Roman Catholics, Baptists and Evangelicals reject ESCR because they contend that it destroys human life which begins at conception. They maintain that compared to adult stem cells, ESCR has not really produced any promising result, and may even give false hope to those suffering from Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, diabetes, spinal chord injuries, and other life threatening illnesses. Buddhists, on the other hand, focus on the intention of the research, which is to reduce human suffering. Many Jews believe that human life begins at birth and that at 40 days, the fetus is merely "water." Muslim scholars date the ensoulment as occurring 120 days after conception. While maintaining a statement of neutrality on ESCR, most leaders of the Latter-day Saints identify themselves as pro-life on abortion and pro-ESCR. Some Protestant churches like the United Church of Christ, United Methodist, and some Presbyterian assemblies support ESCR using established strict scientific guidelines. Instead of discarding/destroying over 400,000 excess embryos, they argue, why not put them to good use through the development of potential therapies? Church authorities also oppose exploitation of women, commercialization, corporate profit, personal gain and invasion of privacy. Still, it is much easier to talk about ESCR from a philosophical, religious, and

political perspective. Commentators point out that it is time to for us to hear the voices of those who are directly affected by chronic, debilitating, and terminal conditions (Tiano, 2006). In response, veteran journalist from Tonopah, Bill Roberts wrote a column relating his story and struggle with Type 1 diabetes. Mr. Roberts calls upon President Bush and that despite his veto of the stem-cell bill, he might later support ESCR in the hope of finding a cure for diabetes not for himself but for his grandchildren (Roberts, 2006). Lately, there have been discussions about the possibility of obtaining just one cell and developing stem cells in a manner without destroying the entire embryo, although this method has its own problems. A clear majority of the public support ESCR, but religious groups are sharply divided on the issue of ESCR and abortion.

Pharmacists' Moral Conscience

In May 2006, the **Nevada Legislative Subcommittee to Review Regulations** voted 4 to 1 in favor on a rule allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions only because of their professional judgment and not based on their religious or moral perspectives (Riley 2006). Also, amidst religious objections by some quarters, on August 24, 2006, the FDA approved to sell the emergency birth control pill, "Plan B" a.k.a. "morning after pill" sold over-the-counter to those 18 or older. Minors will need a prescription to purchase it. The opponents fear that this rule will encourage irresponsible sexual behavior resulting in abortion. The liberals are concerned that if a lone pharmacist in rural Nevada refuses to fill a birth control prescription, the patient will be "abandoned," left without any recourse.

Legalization of marijuana

Although highly controversial, the **Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative**, <http://www.idpi.us/>, composed of clergy and individuals in Clark and Washoe Counties supports question 7 – the regulation of marijuana in the November 2006 ballot. If it passes, Nevada will make history as the first state to vote to undo the marijuana prohibition. The group asserts that current marijuana laws don't work, that instead of curbing its abuse, the punitive approach has

produced excessive and unjust punishments. Meanwhile, the distribution system is run by dangerous criminals who target mainly the youth and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, there were more arrests for simple marijuana possession than for violent crimes like murder, manslaughter, rape, and robbery. Supporters propose that the initiative will legalize the sale of marijuana (up to one ounce) by licensed retail/wholesale establishments and only to those 21 years and older. Thus, the project can generate income through taxes. The opponents of this measure side with the National Drug Control Policy based on the premise that marijuana is a gateway drug leading to the use of hard drugs like methamphetamine, and that marijuana users suffer from reduced hand-eye coordination, slower reaction time, memory loss, limited attention span, and other impairments known to increase the likelihood of accidents. The fear is that legalizing marijuana in one state will open the door to legalizing drugs in other states. Polls have shown that the majority of Nevadans oppose the legalization of marijuana.

Same Sex Marriage/Union

The Nevada constitution Article 1, Section 21, states that only a marriage between a male and female person shall be recognized. There has been strong resistance to gay marriage from various conservative groups as verified by the passing of the initiative in the 2000 and 2002 general elections barring recognition of gay unions registered in other jurisdictions. Still, there are local resources available to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals in Clark and Washoe counties (see Community Resources section in the Appendix).

Spirituality and Healing

In 2005, Patrick Bennett, a graduate of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) conducted his research dissertation among college students demonstrating that writing one's prayers can provide health benefits to those coping with traumatic events. In contrast to rote and mechanized praying, writing one's prayers can be a form of self disclosure, and as such may have a therapeutic power. Further research has been urged to study other "right brain" expressions of

prayer such as painting, drawing, or dance (Miller, 2005). During the last decade, the literature on spirituality and health has been filling book stores. The role of prayer that was outside scientific research in the past is beginning to attract scholarly attention. In 2006, however, researchers from world renowned Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard Medical School indicated that intercessory prayer had **no** effect on heart patients, and worse, the group for which well wishers prayed had a higher incidence of complications (Benson, H., Dusek, J.A., Sherwood, J.B. and others, 2006). The problem with studying the effects of intercessory prayer is isolating and controlling the right variables. Researchers need to know who prays, how often, and for how long. Perhaps a better way to do research on the efficacy of prayer would be to determine its effect on the practitioner, who may benefit from written prayers (see Bennett above) or meditation, which is known to reduce stress and improve health outcomes.

Preemptive vs. Just War

The just war tradition is based on the notion that self-defense can be justified, provided efforts are made to limit the casualties to the combatants. Unfortunately, distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants can be very difficult, as the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah showed. Nor is it always clear what constitutes defensive action. Proponents believe that the war cannot be just unless it represents last resort effort, has reasonable hope of success, and deploys proportional force. Those opposing the just war argument insist that more harm than good is likely to come from such wars, that their aims are hard to pinpoint, and that they inevitably produce unexpected consequences for all the parties involved. Dr. Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, contends that the just war theory supports preemptive strikes. The case in point is the U.S. move to remove Saddam Hussein – an action taken in self-defense. However, Dr. Shaun Casey, Professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary, counters that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was not a just cause because neither weapons of mass destruction nor links to terrorism was ever documented (Religion &

Ethics Newsweekly, 2006). Aside from pacifists, more clergy supported military strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Anti-War Protests

In Reno, the Sierra Interfaith Action for Peace has been meeting consistently for prayer vigils and petitions for nonviolence every Monday night from 5:30 to 6 p.m. outside the Federal Building on South Virginia St. ever since 9/11. Mainline Protestants, liberal Catholics, and others have been demonstrating against the war for quite some time now. The Quakers (Friends) actually began their rallies before military action in Afghanistan. The Friends Center in Philadelphia received several violent threats as well as other pacifists including the Mennonites, Brethren, Amish, and others in the peace church movements (Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, 2003).

Israel vs. Hezbollah

When it comes to the war between Israel and Hezbollah, evangelicals like Richard Land (Southern Baptist), James Dobson (Focus on the Family), Pat Robertson (700 Club), and Christian Zionists backed the Israeli action. Strangely, however, Ted Haggart, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, did not take a stand, saying "Our silence is not a rejection of Israel or even a hesitation about Israel" (Zoll, 2006). Haggart maintains that he wants to protect the evangelical community in Muslim countries. Roman Catholics, Lebanese Christians, and the World Council of Churches (which represents some 350 Protestant and Orthodox Christian churches) have called for an immediate cease fire soon after the fighting began. Fundamental Protestants are pro-Israel because of the belief that the second coming of Christ necessitates total occupation of the land. The return of Jesus, fundamentalist Christians believe, will trigger the Armageddon (valley of Megiddo), the battle of all battles. Still, the relationship between conservative Christians and Jews is stained because such fundamentalists support Israel but reject Judaism. Abraham Foxman, the Anti-Defamation League national director, welcomes the Christian support as long as there are no conditions attached (Foster, 2003).

Immigration

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Moderate/Liberal groups support a comprehensive immigration reform. In an interview given on March 1, 2006, Los Angeles Cardinal Mahoney responded that he would instruct his priests to disobey any law that requires them to verify that an immigrant is legal before providing assistance (Religion & Ethics News Weekly, 2006). In contrast, Southern Baptists and conservative groups see undocumented workers as law breakers and should therefore be imprisoned and deported. Dr. Richard Land believes that God ordained the government to punish those who break the law.

Evangelicals are split on this issue. Hispanic evangelical leaders say they welcome support from Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim groups, but they have been disappointed by the lack of response from both white and black evangelicals. While there is a biblical mandate to care for the aliens, about two-thirds of white evangelicals consider new immigrants a burden to society (Cooperman, 2006). Thousands of Latino immigrants and other supporters in Las Vegas conducted peaceful marches in April 2006. Over 2,000 students and professionals rallied outside the federal building in Reno on April 11, where members of the clergy, a Roman Catholic priest, and a rabbi gave speeches in support of the rights of undocumented workers.

Changing Demographics

The extreme shortage of U.S. Catholic priests and the removal of those involved in sex scandals leave most of them overworked and overextended. New immigrant priests recruited from Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines are more theologically conservative, staunch supporters of celibacy, less sympathetic to women's ordination and social activism. The trend therefore, seems to be that the Roman Catholic clergy will increasingly lean towards being more conservative on these social issues.

Climate change

Evangelicals are also split on the environmental issues. A growing sentiment among "green Christians" or "creation care" is increasing their support for energy conservation and alternative sources for

energy. They are also beating the drum for more responsible stewardship rather than mere consumerism.

Prospects for the Future and Policy Considerations

While these religious traditions share a rich common heritage and sense of obligation to care for others, there is room for more collaborative endeavors and interfaith projects. Here are a few examples of projects that show how intra- and interfaith efforts can succeed.

The **Interfaith Hospitality Network** (IHN) in Las Vegas and Reno provide a temporary home for homeless urban parents and their children due to loss of job and financial crisis. Guest families rotate among the IHN host congregations. They offer free overnight lodging, meals, and hospitality for one week at a time, four to five times a year. Eighteen year old Erin Brosy of Reno was honored with the most prestigious 2006 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards in Washington, D.C. for her volunteerism at IHN. A senior in Earl Wooster High School, Erin increased community awareness about homelessness and raised more than \$6000 for transitional housing. She noted "I was surprised how many children were homeless, including lots of teenagers like me" (Business Wire, May 2006).

The **Religious Alliance in Nevada** (RAIN) provides a forum for cooperative effort among faith communities advocating social justice at the legislature and public arena. Members include Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Nevada (LAMN), Nevada Catholic Conference (Diocese of Las Vegas and Reno), Presbyterian Church (USA) Nevada Presbytery, and United Methodist Church. They focus on issues that affect children and family, criminal justice, health care, revenue, and other social concerns.

The **Nevada Summit on Faith** was initiated by U.S. Sen. Harry Reid who convened the **Faith-Based Services Summit** in Las Vegas in 2005 and in Reno in 2006. The participants discussed housing, senior services, drug abuse prevention, and gang violence

among other issues. The Summit sought to bring religious and secular social service providers and private business.

Bible as literature course is offered by Philip Boardman, professor of English and director of core humanities at the University of Nevada, Reno. Studying the Bible helps understand the origins of western culture and American traditions. When reading African American literature, Professor Boardman explains, students explore the link between the exodus and freedom from slavery. According to Dan Halcomb, English and journalism teacher at Reno High School, "What every good teacher tries to do is teach students how to interpret things on their own" (Miller, 2006).

Baccalaureate services for graduates resume at UNR. The first service was held in 1917 and the last one was in 1960. Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist clergy took part in the service in 2006, each encouraging new graduates to keep the faith and be productive citizens.

The University of Nevada School of Medicine's residency program for Primary Physicians recently received a three-year curricular grant award from the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health to develop a **Spirituality and Medicine** course. The course aims to help train primary care physicians to be more sensitive to the spiritual and cultural needs of Nevada patients and families, as well as to make referrals to health care chaplains as appropriate.

There is no shortage of interfaith outreach programs in Nevada that are offered throughout the Silver State in hospitals, hospices, correctional facilities, places of worship, and community settings. For all their differences, faith community projects share several key commitments and objectives.

- To look after the poor, oppressed, vulnerable populations, sick and dying (Rock singer Bono managed to convince many of the evangelical leaders that the plight of the HIV/AIDS patients is similar to that of the lepers during the time of Jesus).
- To care for the environment and seek alternative/renewable sources of energy as stewards of the earth.

- To promote peace and nonviolence, foster dialogue and understanding among various faith communities.
- To empathize with those who have mental health conditions, the depressed, and families of those who have committed suicide (in 1983, the Vatican changed the code of the canon law allowing Catholics who take their own lives to have a Catholic funeral in a Catholic cemetery).
- To conduct healing rituals for memorials and reconciliation to allow people to grieve the loss of a spouse, a child, a job, a home, soldiers (a synagogue was reopened in Poland just outside the Auschwitz concentration camp spearheaded by an American to enable visiting Jews to pray and reflect; at the Vietnam memorial or the Oklahoma bombing memorial people find healing amidst the horrors and tragedies of war, terrorism, 9/11, 'Katrina' and other calamities).
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu demonstrated to the world that truth and reconciliation can be possible through acknowledging the misdeeds of the apartheid government and advocating forgiveness as part of the process.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a snapshot of contemporary religious issues in Nevada and the nation. A lot more data needs to be gathered before we can gauge the role that religion plays in the silver State. Making progress in this area is important because religious beliefs and practices are known to be related to social health indicators like poverty, suicide, mental health, and substance abuse. This relationship is complex, however. Religious communities are among the first to respond to social crises caused by famines, epidemics, and natural disasters, but they can also harbor a lot of strife and underdevelopment. We need to ask why so many religious nations are poor while the non-totalitarian countries with a high percentage of agnostics and atheists in their midst tend to score the highest on the human development index tracked by the United Nations. We need to explore the tension between monotheism and ecumenism, the manner in which we separate and interlink the affairs of church and state, the consequences of the Religious Right and the Religious Left's heavy involvement in politics. Above all, we

need to look for what all religious groups and denominations have in common and find out how they can work together to improve the quality of life in our community, our nation, and the world.

A good example of the collaborative endeavor that cuts across the religious divides is the **Interfaith Hospitality Network**, also known as Family Promise, which brings together Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Unitarian Universalist congregations and community partners in Las Vegas and Reno. Another example is the **Religious Alliance in Nevada** (RAIN) composed of five Christian denominations. Faith-based initiatives are flourishing in Nevada, and there is reason to believe that they will continue to unite religious practitioners who look for ways to make a difference. As Hans Küng, a Catholic theologian, reminds us, we all must strive to be interfaith peacemakers: "*No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among religions without dialogue between the religions.*"

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Community Resources

Campus Ministers (Roman Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran) UNLV, UNR.

Chaplains (health care, hospice, law enforcement, prison ministries, hotels, airports, gaming), www.professionalchaplains.org, www.nacc.org.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Support:

- **Light of the Soul Christian Ministries**, Reno, <http://www.JesusLightoftheSoul.com>
- **Metropolitan Community Church of the Sierras**, www.mccsierras.org
- **Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**, <http://www.uufnn.org/>

Interfaith ministerial groups (Las Vegas c/o Chaplain Richard Smith, St. Rose Dominican Hospitals; Reno c/o Rabbi Myra Soifer, Temple Sinai).

Interfaith Hospitality Network (Las Vegas and Reno).

Las Vegas churches, <http://www.reviewjournal.com/communitylink/religion.html>.

Las Vegas black churches, <http://www.churchesinlasvegas.com/blackchurches.htm>.

Paiute nation, <http://www.crystalinks.com/paiute.html>.

Parish Nurse programs (Las Vegas, Reno, and Elko).

Religious Alliance in Nevada(Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist) www.rainnv.org.

Student organizations – (Christian, Jewish, Muslim) UNLV, UNR.

Salvation Army, http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn.nsf, **and Rescue Mission**

Sierra Foundation (Turkish-Muslim organization in Reno) – www.sierraf.org.

Sierra Interfaith Action for Peace (SIAP) – Reno, Patsy Gehr at (775) 326-4739.

Twelve-step programs (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous) that meet in churches, <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/?Media=PlayFlash>.

Acknowledgement

This report has been prepared by Noel Tiano, ThD, Director of the Nevada Center for Ethics & Health Policy. He is also an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and a board certified chaplain. You can contact Dr. Tiano at NCEHP, University of Nevada, Reno/M.S. 339, Reno, NV 89557, tel.: 775-327-2309, Email: noel@unr.edu.

Supplementary Materials

Table 1. Nevada 2000 report

ARDA – The Association of Religion Data Archives http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/state/32_2000.asp

The historically African American denominations are not included in the 2000 congregation and membership totals

Religious Denominations	Congregations	Adherents
American Baptist Association	4	802
American Baptist Churches in the USA	21	7,863
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of NorthAmerica	1	330
Armenian Apostolic Church/Catholicossate of Etchmiadzin	2	847
Assemblies of God	56	22,691
Baha'i	11	1,124
Baptist Missionary Association of America	1	86
Buddhist	12	Unknown
Calvary Chapel Fellowship Churches	10	Unknown
Roman Catholic Church	67	331,844
Christian and Missionary Alliance	5	247
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	2	665
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	7	9,164
Christian Reformed Church in North America	3	369
Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)	6	262
Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)	9	960
Church of God of Prophecy	4	175
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	282	116,925
Church of the Nazarene	19	2,502
Churches of Christ	26	2,326
Community of Christ	2	518
Conservative Baptist Association of America	8	1,140
Episcopal Church	34	5,469
Evangelical Free Church of America	5	957
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	17	10,663
Free Methodist Church of North America	3	45
Friends (Quakers)	2	80
General Association of Regular Baptist Churches	3	272
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	4	1,392
Hindu	1	Unknown
Independent, Charismatic Churches	2	1,090
Independent, Non-Charismatic Churches	3	4,350
International Church of the Foursquare Gospel	27	3,311
International Churches of Christ	2	494
International Pentecostal Holiness Church	3	198
Jewish (estimate)	23	77,100
Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod	23	7,654
Muslim (estimate)	3	2,291
Orthodox Church in America: Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America	1	28
Orthodox Church in America: Territorial Dioceses	2	498
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	2	20
Pentecostal Church of God	4	220
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	19	7,202
Presbyterian Church in America	2	200
Reformed Baptist Churches	1	Unknown
Salvation Army	7	1,239

Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA	1	800
Seventh-day Adventist Church	16	2,789
Sikh	3	Unknown
Southern Baptist Convention	111	40,233
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations	2	289
United Church of Christ	4	688
United Methodist Church	31	10,452
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches	2	258
Vineyard USA	7	1,219
Wesleyan Church	3	514
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	7	1,634
Totals (Unadjusted)*	937	684,489
Totals (Adjusted)**		798,831

The population of this state in 1990 was 1,201,833; in 2000 it was 1,998,257. The total population changed 66.3%. The unadjusted adherent totals of the religious groups listed above (684,489) include 34.3% of the total population in 2000. The *adjusted* total adherents (798,831) include 40.0% of the population.

Source

*The “**Unadjusted Totals**” come from the 1990 and 2000 data collected by representatives of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB). While quite comprehensive, this data excludes most of the historically African-American denominations and some other major groups. As a result, these numbers will be an underestimate of the total adherence rate, particularly in areas with a large African-American population. The 2000 data included 149 religious groups and the final results are published in Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000. Copyright © 2002, All rights reserved. The 1990 data included 132 groups and the final results are published in Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990 Copyright © 1990, All rights reserved. Published by Glenmary Research Center, 1312 Fifth Ave., North, Nashville, TN 37208, <http://www.glenmary.org/grc/>. [[More information on the data collection](#)]

The “Adjusted Totals**” include all adherents in the denominations counted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and estimates adherent totals for the historically African-American denominations and other religious groups not listed in the ASARB totals. [An article by Roger Finke and Christopher P. Scheitle](#) (2005) reviews how these estimates were computed.

Table 3. Major Religious Traditions and Partisanship, 1992-2004*

	2004		2000		1996		1992		1992-2004 (Net Change)	
	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem
Entire Samples	38	42	39	42	41	42	37	41	+1	+1
Evangelical Protestant	56	27	51	33	53	33	48	32	+8	-5
Mainline Protestant	44	39	50	33	49	34	50	32	-6	+7
Black Protestant	11	71	12	74	15	80	10	77	+1	-6

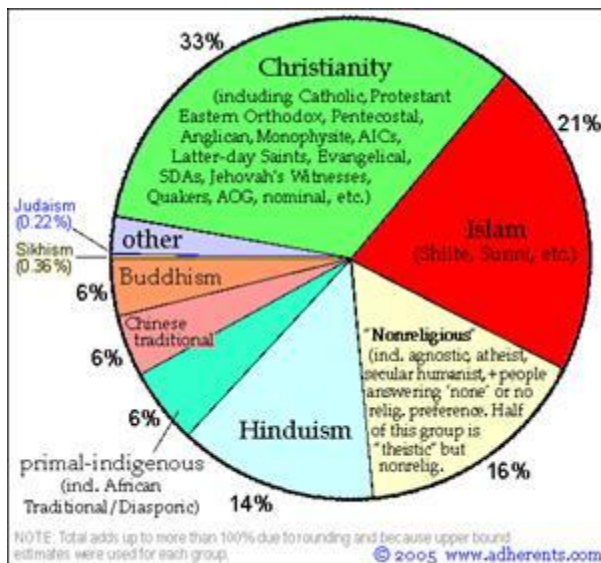
Roman Catholic	41	44	37	43	39	44	38	43	+3	-1
Latino Catholic	15	61	25	57	29	52	22	49	-7	+12
Jewish	21	68	24	47	29	51	18	45	+3	+23
Unaffiliated	27	42	32	41	37	40	30	41	-3	+2

**Independents omitted for ease of presentation; independents equal to 100 minus the sum of each pairs of numbers in a single year.*

Source: National Surveys of Religion and Politics, Bliss Institute of Applied Politics 1992 (n=4001); 1996 (n=4034); 2000 (n=6000); 2004 (n=4000)

Major World Religions (www.adherents.com) Approximate estimates:

1. Christianity: 2.1 billion
2. Islam: 1.3 billion
3. Secular/nonreligious/agnostic/atheist: 1.1 billion
4. Hinduism: 900 million
5. Chinese traditional religion: 394 million
6. Buddhism: 376 million
7. Primal-indigenous: 300 million
8. African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million
9. Sikhism: 23 million
10. Spiritism: 15 million
11. Judaism: 14 million



*This report stems from the Justice & Democracy forum on the Leading Social Indicators in Nevada that took place on November 5, 2004, at the William S. Boyd School of Law. The report, the first of its kind for the Silver State, has been a collaborative effort of the University of Nevada faculty, Clark County professionals, and state of Nevada officials. The Social Health of Nevada report was made possible in part by a Planning Initiative Award that the Center for Democratic Culture received from the UNLV President's office for its project "Civic Culture Initiative for the City of Las Vegas." Individual chapters are brought on line as they become available. For further inquiries, please contact authors responsible for individual reports or email CDC Director, Dr. Dmitri Shalin shalin@unlv.nevada.edu.