

**10,001 Congregations:  
H. Paul Douglass, Strictness and Electric Guitars**

by David A. Roozen  
Email: [roozen@hartsem.edu](mailto:roozen@hartsem.edu).

Forthcoming In The: *Review of Religious Research*

*Originally delivered as the H. Paul Douglass Lecture at the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association, Columbus, Ohio, October 19-21, 2001.*

*Note: The published version of this lecture is not yet available but will be posted in the near future.*

***Introduction***

*Members and Friends of the RRA, it is an honor and my great pleasure to be invited to address you in the name of H. Paul Douglass. In preparation for this occasion I talked with several prior H. Paul Douglass lecturers and the one common bit of wisdom that they shared with me was not to worry about my title. Don't worry, they told me, because by the time you actually get around to writing the paper the published title almost certainly will be outdated. Darned if they weren't right. Despite my careful and painstakingly thoughtful choice of each word in the title, including consultation with such phrase-makers in our trade as Jay Demerath and Reg Bibby, it turns out that the title should have been 14,301 congregations, not 10,001. The lack of poetry and mystique notwithstanding, it should have been 14,301 congregations because that is how many congregations there are in the Faith Communities Today survey (Roozen, Dudley and Thumma 2000) which I will use as one of the two poles for my reflections in this paper.*

*The Faith Communities Today survey (FACT) was a cooperative effort among agencies and organizations representing 41 denominations and faith groups - from Southern Baptist to Bahai, Methodist to Muslim to Mormon, Assemblies of God to Unitarian Universalist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jew, and all the usual oldline Protestant players. The groups worked together to develop a common, key informant questionnaire. Groups then adapted wordings to their respective traditions and conducted their own survey, typically mailed during 2000 to a stratified random sample of a group's congregations. Return rates averaged over 50% with independent congregations proving their independence with the lowest rate of return and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints demonstrating one of the virtues of hierarchy with a 98% return rate. Data from the total of 14,301 returns from the various group samples were returned to our coordinating, Hartford Institute for Religion Research office for aggregation. Zip code level census data was added to each congregational case and the cases in the aggregated dataset weighted to provide proportionate representation of each denomination and faith group. The survey was funded by the Lilly Endowment, with matching funding from the participant groups. More detailed information about participants and methodology, as well as an electronic copy of the original FACT report can be found on the FACT website: [www.fact.hartsem.edu](http://www.fact.hartsem.edu). ▲*

*I suspect that most readers can appreciate the challenge of trying to aggregate the data from 14,000 congregations from 26 different sub-surveys. I also suspect that most can appreciate the thrill of turning one's desk top version of SPSS loose on a congregational dataset with 14,000 cases. Now imagine 48 research projects leading to 78 books and reports, including data from over 30,000 congregations and an equal or greater number of households, all in a span of 13 years - and beginning at your fiftieth birthday. I do not believe that even Robert Wuthnow could keep that pace. But that was what Hadden (1980: 73) calls the "dazzling, even mind-boggling, pace of research" during the 13 year life of Douglass' Institute for Social and Research, beginning in 1921. While many will point to Douglass' 1000 City Churches (1926) as his best book, it is his summative *The Protestant Church as A social Institution* (1935), co-authored with Edmund deS. Brunner (the first H. Paul Douglass Lecturer), that I want to use as the second pole of my reflections in this paper.*

*I turn to the work of Douglass himself, and most specifically his study of congregations, for this occasion for several reasons. It was just about a generation ago that Jeffrey Hadden (1980) presented the last lecture that substantively focused on Douglass, and if it is true that each new American generation has to re-church itself, then it seems only appropriate that each new generation of social scientists of religion should re-appropriate the insights of the founder of religious research. This is all the more true because as Hadden (1980: 74) appropriately notes, even after half a century reading Douglass still "provokes the mind to new and subtle ideas that have not yet been adequately mined."*

*I also wanted to take this opportunity to connect FACT to Douglass because, although we did not think about it at the time, FACT and the Cooperative Congregational Studies Project that produced it, stands in direct lineage with Douglass and his Institute for Social and Religious Research and bears many family resemblances in approach and intent. FACT, for example, was not only large in scale and broadly cooperative, and it not only used the organizational form of the congregation as its unit of analysis and included both internal and contextual dimensions in its conceptualization of the congregation, but most importantly FACT was primarily oriented to "church" practice and policy in its conception, implementation, interpretation and dissemination.*

*A final reason for connecting FACT to Douglass is the simple fact that Douglass' and his Institute's perspective and data present such an immensely rich portrait of the state of the American congregation and of the state of the art of congregational studies just after World War I. This was the time when empirical sociology was just beginning to come into prominence. More importantly, it was the time when, according to Ann Douglas (1995: 192), "The modern world as we know it today . . . arrived on the scene."*

*With one pole of my reflections in Douglass and colleagues' work during the 1920s and early 1930s, and the second pole in the recent Faith Communities Today survey, I want to ponder two questions with you:*

- *First, how has the conceptualization we bring to the study of congregations changed over the last three quarters of a century?*

- *Second, how has the nature of the American congregation changed over this period.*

*For those of you who tend to read titles as abstracts, you are correct to assume that I chose "strictness" and "electric guitars" to symbolize change and continuity with Douglass' work, respectively. And for those of you feeling the need to make a rational choice about reading further, and therefore needing to know, before we start, where we will end up, let me just note that I will conclude with what I think Douglass might say to us if he were here today.* ▲

### ***Continuities and Change in our Conceptualization of Congregations***

#### *Church Driven*

*It is a truism taught in every introductory methods course that we tend to see what we're looking for, that we see most efficiently when we use focusing lenses, and that the conceptualization and theory we bring to a data gathering exercise not only provide these lenses, but also provide the frames by which we interpret our perception. One might be tempted therefore to begin an examination of Douglass by asking about his theoretical perspective. If this lecture was a few years ago I might have predicted that anyone who presumed such a theoretical starting point belonged in the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR). But the 50th anniversary issue of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (2000) should have put to rest any simplistic assumptions about, on the one hand, a theory/practice divide between the SSSR and Religious Research Association (RRA), and on the other hand, should have put to rest any simplistic assumptions about the lack of meaningful difference between the two organizations. In the RRA's case this is its distinctive predisposition toward helping religious groups achieve institutional goals. The latter is, of course, a Douglass legacy. For Douglass it was absolutely true that while in theory there is no difference between theory and practice, there is a great deal of difference in practice. The Protestant Church as a Social Institution (Douglass and Brunner 1935) makes it abundantly clear that Douglass' driving passion and guiding light was the practice and policy of the church, not theory formation. As Brunner (1959a: 6-7) tells us in the first H. Paul Douglass Lecture in 1958, "Douglass was not interested in truth for truth's sake. To him truth had its own compulsions to be practically applied to the concerns of man." And as Brunner (7-8) also tells us, Douglass further believed, and believed in apparent opposition to the theologians and denominational leaders of his day - their indifference to the work of the Institute being cited as a primary reason for Rockefeller pulling his funding-- that the concerns of the institutional church could benefit from being based "not on enthusiasms and hunches but on facts and usable knowledge." Which do they want, Brunner (11-12) tells us that Douglass asked, presaging the critical tone of much of church oriented sociology of religion in the 1960s, "effective religion or ineffective churches?" and, "What shall it profit a church if it save its denominational name and lose religion?"*

*Douglass' focus was on the situation of the church and in this one hears the presaging of Carroll's (2000: 554) argument in the Special 50th Anniversary Issue of JSSR that the goal of applied research in religious organizations is the "reflexive monitoring of their situation." Most importantly for present purposes, in being focused on the situation of the church, Douglass used the situation of the church as his primary lens. AND, as I believe that both Brunner (1959b) and*

*Hadden (1980) correctly perceive, Douglass' master lens was organizational adaptation to a changing environment. "Organizational adaptation to a changing environment." It sounds so ordinary to us today that it is hard to believe it was once a novel and radical idea.*

*What was the changing environment that focused Douglass' attention? Being the 1920s it was rural to urban migration and the turn-of-the-century waves of immigration that tended to hit shore in our cities. Readers will recall, for example, that the 1920 census was the first to find that a majority of the American population was located in cities.*

*The very naming of the lense, "Organizational adaptation to a changing environment," suggests that the social contextual or demand side of the equation was the primary driver of change in Douglass' read of the situation, and I suspect that is how most of us think about Douglass' contributions. However, his major concern was not the context per se, but rather with the how and why of supply side change, specifically the adaptation (or the lack there of) of religious organizations. Accordingly, when he looked at the congregation itself he tended to see the products and processes of adaptation. More specifically, he saw a congregation's:*

- *Participants*
- *Activities and program*
- *Resources - money and facilities, and*
- *Ministerial leadership.*

*Further, he clearly saw worship as a congregation's primary task, with education a close second. And, while he did not see much formal programming in the rural church, he did see that: the primary adaptation of the urban church to the changing population groups in the urban environment was the development of social fellowship and social welfare programs. Indeed, this is precisely the turn of the century shift that Holifield (1994) describes in his recent history of American congregations as the shift from the "devotional" type of congregations of mid-19th town and country origin, to the 20th century "social" congregation of the urban environment. ▲*

*The resonance of the "community center" functions of Steve Warner's (1993) new paradigm congregation, with the urban, social fellowship adaptation that Douglass first identified, hints at why one can read Douglass so profitably today. In many respects, however, the social change for which social fellowship programming was adaptive is a deeper, broader, and more critical contribution that Douglass offered all of sociology almost 75 years ago. It is nothing less than the identification of urbanization's push toward a new principle of human association. It is what Douglass and Brunner (1935: 74ff) call, "association by selective affinity." Although probably taken for granted by most readers today, the reasons Douglass and Brunner suggest it arises are well worth recalling. In contrast to rural life Douglass and Brunner (1935: 76) observe that "the urban community is complicated and rapidly changing." They continue:*

*To understand the significance of what has happened, one must consider that the relationships of the rural community concern the same people over and over again. . . Full-blown urbanization, on the contrary, gives the adult city or suburban dweller a different set of fellows for every major relationship. ...these associations are based on selective affinity rather than on continuity in a self-contained neighborhood or upon the deeper ties of the racial group or family clan. . . . the*

*fellowship of the urban church [therefore] tends to be reduced to merely one of the many ties which persons detached from locality, and in great numbers detached from family, recognize with segments of their personalities, each expressing itself in a different setting and a response to a different set of people and moral standards."*

*Thus we have an intensifying movement from American voluntarism to Roof and McKinney's (1987) "new voluntarism" and even further to the consumerism of the new paradigm - all set before us 75 years ago through survey data and rich collections of case studies.*

*Those of you who have not had the pleasure of reading Douglass may be more familiar with the subject of congregational adaptation through my colleague Nancy Ammerman's (1997a) recent *Congregations & Community*. Indeed, adapting to changing neighborhood characteristics is the focal topic of *Congregations & Community*, and the connection to Douglass is so direct that in her introduction, Ammerman (3) states that, "In many ways, this work is a sequel - seventy years later - to pioneering work done by H. Paul Douglass."*

*I call your attention to *Congregations and Community* not only because it is one of those rare sequels that does justice to the original, but more importantly because it provides a perfect vehicle for looking at continuities and change since Douglass' time in the situation of the church and in how we study congregations. Given what I have said above about Douglass, one should not be surprised by the striking continuities, including Ammerman's "niche" type adaptation and her exchange with "Bowling Alone's" Putnam (2000) about the changing nature of community association.*

*But there also are, of course, differences. What fascinates me most about the new layers of conceptualization that Ammerman's analysis adds to those of Douglass is that one can trace their emergence to specific periods in which the church, primarily oldline Protestantism because this was, historically, the social location of religious research, faced new situations which problematized different aspects of church life.* ▲

*Religious research basically went into a holding pattern during the depression and through WWII. But Douglass' community study approach shot into high gear in service of the surge in new church development of the immediate post war period. One might say that it was Douglass meeting the baby boom and suburbanization, and applied religious research like many things about oldline Protestantism may have reached quantitative highs during this period (see, Carroll 2000).*

*The 1960s changed church priorities, at least in oldline Protestantism, from church development to racial justice. Congregations were bashed. Religious research agencies were gutted. To the extent congregations were the topic of any sociological conversation it was to criticize their resistance to and irrelevance for social justice.*

*Declining oldline Protestant numbers and the related identity crisis gave rise to several new theoretical and conceptual trajectories. Perhaps most importantly the declines finally freed secularization theorists to apply their "old" plausibility paradigms to America (e.g., Swatos 1999). But the declines also, of course, prompted a new surge of "church decline" research*

where folk like Dean Hoge and myself (1979) would re-popularize Douglass' distinction between institutional and contextual factors. Relatedly and to give credit to the opposite possibility, the declines also prompted a surge in church growth research and consultations, the most provocative of which (e.g., McGavern 1970; Wagner 1976) used a missionary perspective to rediscover what Douglass had years earlier observed as American fact, namely: "homogeneity." And as if homogeneity wasn't hard enough for oldline Protestants to deal with, Dean Kelley (1972) in the somewhat peculiar but immensely provocative merging of old paradigm sociological plausibility with church growth had the audacity to suggest that the strictness of organizational culture was the reason that conservative churches were growing. What a great time to be a religious researcher. Church leaders and theologians - at least some leaders and theologians - were actually fighting about what religious researchers were saying! However, with the exception of strictness and plausibility, all of the church comity and church growth research stood in direct continuity with Douglass. More important for the further conceptual development of congregational studies were two other "new" developments.

One was "Process," or as some have said, the triumph of organizational dynamics over organizational structure and authority. Structure and authority were present to some extent in the work of Douglass, but almost exclusively through the role of the pastor. Organizational development (OD) and process were almost totally absent.

I've heard it said that the National Guard shooting of college students at Kent State in May, 1970 symbolically marked the point at which the baby boomer's social idealism turned inward. It was roughly around this same period that group process bloomed into the internally focused organizational development movement. As OD found its way into the church through parish renewal consultations, it was accompanied by a variety of process studies and related research instrumentation. More importantly for my argument, the emergence of process studies corresponded with the next categorical shift noted by Holifield (1994) in his history of American congregations. It was the shift, to use his language from the previously noted turn of the century, "social" type congregation to what Holifield calls "participatory congregations." The defining idea of this type of congregation, according to Holifield (1994: 45), is the "increasing demand by laity for participation in the congregations on their own terms. In the earlier institutional churches, a leadership elite, usually clerical, had defined the direction of the organizational elaboration." Building lay ownership and managing their participation became required leadership skills, and the consumer orientation of American congregational life took another leap forward. Accordingly one finds in Ammerman's *Congregations and Community* special attention being given to the skills and predispositions of members (as well as of the pastors), to lay involvement in decision making, and to conflict management. ▲

If Robert Wuthnow (1988) is correct in his *Restructuring American Religion*, there was a second triumph of process occurring at roughly this same time, and again its primary location was oldline Protestantism. This second triumph of process, I would suggest, led directly to the second major post-war development in congregational studies. It is what Wuthnow (1997) calls in another place the turn toward organizational culture, or what more popularly has become known as congregational identity. In *Restructuring* Wuthnow notes that the ideation of liberal Protestant leaders during the immediate post WWII period was increasingly conditioned by a growing diversity of religious views. As a direct consequence: "Having themselves been unable

*to find an authoritative basis for espousing a particular biblical interpretation, they relied increasingly on the argument that the important thing was less what one believed than how one had arrived at these beliefs (Wuthnow 1988: 69). "The consequence was a shift in religious authority, Wuthnow claims, "from doctrinal validation to procedural validation." This was, arguably, a perfectly reasonable, theologically liberal response to diversity. However, I do not think it surprising that at the very same time you find church historians beginning to talk seriously about a mounting identity crisis within oldline Protestantism (Smylie 1979). Nor do I think it surprising that by the mid 1980s the cultural turn was full blown in organizational studies more broadly (e.g., the "new institutionalism," Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), and that the Handbook for Congregational Studies (Carroll, Dudley and McKinney 1986) had made "Congregational Identity" one of its four primary lenses for viewing congregations.*

*In summary, if you take Douglass' beginning framework of context, participants, program, resources and ministerial leadership, and then add identity and process to it, you basically have the table of contents for the Handbook for Congregational Studies and its follow-up volume, Studying Congregations (Ammerman, et al., 1998). You also have one of the two major axes that constituted the conceptual matrix for the Faith Communities Today core questionnaire.*

### *Theory Driven*

*Douglass started with the situation of the church and ended with program and policy recommendations for the church. It wasn't that he was unconcerned with theory, it is just that theory wasn't his job. But as suggested above, the breadth of his observation and insightfulness of his interpretation do provide a rich resource for theoretical development and refinement. The ecologically oriented (e.g., Eiesland 2000) will find a wealth of possibility in Douglass' history of colonial religion, his observation of waves of population and related organizational movements through urban areas, his call for regionalism in town and country areas, his undying advocacy for interchurch cooperation and, of course, his focus on adaptation. The currently new round of interest on immigrant religion (e.g., Warner and Wittner 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) will find a comfortably familiar, comparative perspective in Douglass, including observation on the challenges of language and the importance of congregations as ethnic community centers. They also will find reinforcement for their suspicions that globalized communication and transnationalism are indeed late 20th century developments that are changing the nature of assimilative pathways.*

*Those more into studying the characteristics and dynamics of membership (e.g., Roozen and Hadaway 1993) should love Douglass' version of marginal members; the entry point orientation of his study of program attachments, his observations about family cycle effects and his triangulation of individualism, association by selective affinity and homogeneity. What social scientist could not love someone who observed such things as: "The unchurched are a residuum deposited by population movements with which the church has not yet caught up (Douglass and Brunner, 1935: 58)." And those working to relate more expressive styles of seekership, spirituality and worship to church vitality (e.g., Hadaway and Roozen 1995; Donald Miller 1997) would absolutely love his "distinction between the vital and the formal in religion, that is to say between what would stir an emotional response and what would fail to do so (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 295)."*

Unfortunately, not all theoretical perspectives will find a friendly pot of historical observation in the work of Douglass. As noted above, those more into broad cultural interpretations will find a frustrating void in the work of the Douglass' Institute, as will those that work from more resource and political mobilization perspectives (e.g., Williams 1996). I suspect that Douglass' rootage in the establishment of oldline Protestantism, the critical nature of his empiricism notwithstanding, turned his attention more to adaptation than to transformation. ▲

Most fundamentally, however, I think it fair to say that Douglass would be so at home with Warner's "new" paradigm that he may have asked why it had to be labeled, "new." In his now classic introduction of the new paradigm Warner (1993: 1050) states, "The analytical key to the new paradigm is the disestablishment of the churches and the rise of an open [distinctively competitive] market for religion." Religion in the United States, he says, "should not be thought of as either the Parsonian conscience of the whole or the Bergian refuge of the periphery, but as the vital expression of groups (1047);" religion has been and remains a refuge of free association and autonomous identity (1060); "and religion has been and remains a refuge for "cultural particularity (1061)." Then in summary: "With appropriate complications and qualifications, religion in the United States is and has long been (a) disestablished, (b) culturally pluralistic, (c) structurally adaptable, and (d) empowering (1075)."

I have already talked at length about Douglass' focus on the adaptation of congregations, the emergence of the community center model for congregations and how this was, at least in the urban setting, related to selective affiliation. As might be expected he was, relatedly, keenly aware of and even appreciative of competition. In describing the church situation in the United States, for example, he states, "far more churches than can well be sustained have been organized. This has brought about acute competition between them; and the ultimate control of the situation rests in the hands of a selective mortality, by which the more superfluous and less efficient are dying off while the stronger and more useful survive (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 21)." Then in a line that again could be directly from Stark and Finke (e.g., 2000): "An area without a representative variety of churches is apt to have a disproportionate number of unchurched Protestants (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 45)."

Finally, in what for me is the most intriguing and prophetic statement in *The Protestant Church as a Social Institution*, listen to what Douglass and Brunner (1935: 205) wrote almost 70 years ago about Americanization.

"The unspoken assumption is that the cultural minorities are to be absorbed in the tradition of the major group. It is this assumption that creates the problem. An alternative assumption is called cultural pluralism. It looks not only with toleration but with appreciation upon a variety of social practices and standards, and conceives of the social unity of the nation as being permanently realized in diversity (emphasis added)."

There are, nevertheless, a few things in the loosely coupled work of the new paradigm that would appear foreign to Douglass, particularly a few things emanating from the now strongly advocated stream of rational choice theory (e.g., Stark and Finke 2000). Douglass had nothing against rationality to be sure, and as indicated above he had a deep appreciation for competition. And while he never did talk about free riders he did talk about lazy "laymen." But

*probably the most conspicuously and totally absent rational choice notion in the work of Douglass is that of "strictness." As hinted at previously, I think this has something to do with Douglass' minimum attention to theology and identity, and partly because of his social location within then establishment Protestantism. For Douglass there tended to be only two Protestant streams, establishment Protestant and sectarian. Establishment Protestant congregations were, in Douglass' analysis, peopled by highly individualistic, religious pragmatists who had little interest in the abstractions and dogmatisms of the theologians. Indeed Douglass' descriptions of the typical person in the pew often make Ammerman's (1997b) golden rule Christians look like over achievers. Given his pragmatic perception of establishment lay persons I think it fair to say that it struck Douglass as unlikely that strictness was a viable policy option for his constituents. Not that sectarian religion or strictness was somehow a bad thing, it was just irrelevant as an applied option within his world and therefore not a lens through which he perceived congregations.* ▲

*An exception or two notwithstanding, Douglass clearly embraced what Warner sets out as the defining principles of the new paradigm and I think the affinity across 70 years is largely due to the fact that both Douglass and the new paradigm are so tightly focused on the empirical reality of American religious institutions. One should not be surprised, therefore, that *The Protestant Church As A Social Institution* would include a concluding statement to the effect that unless American attitudes toward life utterly changed, it is likely that religion will be as integral "an interest a century hence as it is today (Douglass and Brunner, 1935: 319)."*

### ***Continuities and Change in the Nature of Congregations***

*In comparing today's conceptualization of the congregation with the work of Douglass one has to be struck by two things. First, by the continuities. Second, by the fact that the new lenses that have emerged since Douglass' time are traceable to specific changes in the situation of the church. In the space remaining I want to continue to pursue the question of the changing nature of the church, as opposed to the changing nature of its conceptualization, through a comparison of many of the empirical findings reported by Douglass with the data on Protestant churches from the Faith Communities Today study.*

*As already noted, Douglass was a firm believer in the empirical reality of the homogeneity principle, although this is clearly one of those areas in which he wished that the sociological reality did contradict his theological hope. Connecting homogeneity to Douglass' study of population changes, it is not surprising to hear Douglass conclude that each new wave of population has to church itself. Migration and immigration patterns are different today, but that new populations develop their own congregations or take over and transform existing congregations would strike Douglass as business as usual.*

*Additionally, although I am not aware that he directly addressed the issue, I do not think that Douglass would be surprised that local, new immigrant religious gatherings often take on a congregational, community center structure. Douglass for example observed this among black populations migrating from the rural south to northern cities. Warner and Wittner (1998) and Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) provide wonderfully rich ethnographic perspective on this development today, but the Muslim data from FACT, for example, provides interesting breadth of*

*perspective. Indeed, one can log on to the FACT website right now ([www.fact.hartsem.edu](http://www.fact.hartsem.edu)) and find out that 70% of Muslim congregations are involved with food pantries or similar programs, 77% have counseling or similar programs, 19% have day care or pre- or after school programs, and that Muslim congregations have about the same level of difficulty as do Protestant congregations in finding volunteers for their various programs.* ▲

*Homogeneity may be the sociological reality that connects the missiological church growth literature with the Warner's new paradigm. But at least in regard to race, homogeneity runs counter to many denominations' theology, and in some instances, nearly a half century of program and parish development efforts. One might hope, therefore, that Douglass' immense data base could provide some baseline for gauging the success of efforts to develop inclusive congregations. It does appear that member race was a variable in several of Douglass' studies of urban congregations, at least one finds it within the survey instruments appended to several Institute reports (e.g., Douglass 1926). However, I have not been able to locate an Institute report in which members' racial distribution is reported. Nevertheless, if the current FACT data is any indication, it is hard to imagine much improvement. Specifically, the FACT data show that in over 95% of all Protestant and over 90% of oldline Protestant congregations, more than 80% of participants are from the same major racial/ethnic group.*

*The major contextual change occupying Douglass' attention was the urban to rural migration. Given this, it is a bit puzzling to me that neither *The Protestant Church As A Social Institution* nor related books appear to contain an estimate of the rural/urban distribution of congregations or at least of differentials in new church development. Fortunately we can get a qualified feel for this in the FACT data by cross-tabulating year of founding and current location. In doing this one finds that of existing Protestant congregations founded prior to 1927, 29% are rural; of existing Protestant congregations founded since 1926, only 14% are rural. One finds a similar decline in new church development before and after Douglass in small towns and a slight increase for cities. One finds a huge increase, as one might expect, in the suburbs: from 11% of Protestant churches started before 1927 being located in the suburbs to a full third of congregations started after Douglass being located in the suburbs. If one just looks at oldline Protestantism the respective rural and town declines and suburban increases are even more dramatic.*

*Turn of the century urbanization had several implications for the church. One was the decline and death of many rural congregations Urban population shifts also challenged the adaptiveness of urban congregations, but survival was a particularly acute problem in the rural, out-migration areas of early 20th century America. Three quarters of a century later there is comparatively good news for the rural church in the FACT study. It is that current growth/decline rates for rural Protestant churches are very similar to those for town and city congregations, related no doubt to the fact that population growth rates are no longer hugely different. In today's world it is the suburbs, of course, I where the action is, with over four in ten congregations growing by more than 10% since 1995 according to the FACT survey. The survey also shows that a near majority of new immigrant congregations are located in the suburbs as well as 80% of that late 20th century adaptation, the mega-church.*

*However, the more important implications of the rural out-migration that Douglass observed were its effects on the urban church. Two of these are particularly central in Douglass' study of the urban church. One was the increasing diversity of program. The second was the increasing erosion of congregations' ties to a sense of place. Douglass notes that the urban church was, during his period, still one of the more localized aspects of city life with about half of adherents traveling less than a mile to church. But he then turns this upside down by speaking more about the half that travel more than a mile and about the clear evidence that the farther one lives from the church the lower one's involvement (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 77). ▲*

*In today's world dominated by expressways rather than pathways, no recent survey of congregations has even imagined that a one mile measure of travel distance would be sufficient. Indeed, Mark Chaves' (1998) National Congregations Study (NCS), Cynthia Woolevers' (2001) U.S. Congregational Life Survey Project and FACT used time rather than distance. In contrast to Douglass' finding that half of adherents travel less than a mile, NCS (Chaves, 1998) finds that for a majority of congregations the majority of attendees travel more than 10 minutes to congregation, and that in over 10% of congregations a majority of attendees travel more than 30 minutes to the congregation. The FACT data shows that such church commutes are still less than typical work commutes, but it is clear that the neighborhood congregation is an increasing rarity, especially outside of Catholicism.*

*Mobility and transition were nearly synonymous with urban for Douglass and relatedly he notes, almost in passing, that three out of every four urban congregations studied (p 70) "have moved at least once in their histories (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 70)." I must admit to finding it hard to believe this figure. Having lived in New England for over 25 years I know that a lot of congregations have moved during their 200+ year histories, but 75% struck me as even high by New England standards. Right and wrong - indeed, more wrong than right! The FACT data shows that overall, only 71% of today's Protestant, city churches have moved at least once. It also shows that 80% of today's Protestant city churches founded before 1927 have moved at least once.*

*The major implication of urbanization for the structure of congregations for Douglass was, as noted above, the elaboration and diversification of programming in response to the diversity, mobility and selective affinity found in the city. The very heart of urban church adaptation for Douglass was the development of new, constituency oriented programs. By this he meant the development of social fellowship and material welfare type programs, in contrast to the more explicitly religious and nearly universal programs of worship and Christian education which were the mainstay of the rural congregation. Indeed, Douglass' major typology of urban congregations was based on their degree of adaptation. His non-adapted urban type was basically a rural devotional church transported to the city. Douglass' second most adapted type, the internally adapted church, had moved into social fellowship type programs such as parenting classes, recreation programs, drama and age/gender specific programs like boy and girl scouts. His most adapted type, what he called "fully adapted churches," not only had a full spectrum of social fellowship programs, but also an evolving range of social welfare programs. He also noted that there were relatively few of the latter, even in the city, in part because even into the beginning of the 20th century, the vast majority of religious social welfare work was done by para-congregational agencies and organizations; not by congregations. ▲*

*The FACT data shows that today, just as in Douglass' time, the Protestant city church is more programmatically elaborated than the rural church, the city church today having roughly half again more internally focused and social welfare programs than the rural church. The FACT data also tends to show that today, just as in Douglass' time, there is a set of near universal kinds of programs across types of congregations, these being worship, basic religious education, choirs (in those traditions that use music), and young adult programs, although the percent of congregations having the latter appears to have dropped somewhat since Douglass' time. The FACT data further shows that while what Douglass would characterize as constituency specific social fellowship and social welfare programs continue to be less pervasive than his more explicitly religious type programs, social programming appears to be considerably more present in congregations today than previously. Direct comparison of specific types of programs between Douglass' measures and the FACT measures is a bit of a stretch. However, it appears relatively safe to say that the prevalence of social fellowship type programs in such areas as recreation, the performing arts and parenting classes in urban Protestant churches have more than doubled in the past 70 years, and can be found in between 40 and 70% of urban congregations today. It also appears safe to say that while social welfare programming remains slightly less prevalent than social fellowship programming, it has increased more dramatically over the past 70 years, in some areas of programming like health and day care services this increase being more than five fold.*

*Such changes would not have surprised Douglass. But at least his primary interpretive frame would have been challenged with the FACT finding that size is a more important determinant of the extent of social programming than rural/urban. Even when one controls on size the FACT data shows that today the rural church is almost as programmatically developed as the city church, except for the very smallest congregations.*

*Douglass would have liked the secular recruiting slogan of several years ago that challenged persons to, "Be all that you can be!" I think he would have liked it because as his close colleague Edmund ds Brunner (1959a, 1959b) tells us in the first H. Paul Douglass lecture, that is*

*precisely what Douglass wanted for the church, and that is precisely the end toward which Douglass firmly believed that scientifically informed policy could contribute. And while Douglass was well aware that there were limits on the extent to which the scientific viewpoint could approximate theological ideals, his thirst for the empirical convinced him that the institutional church was so distant from the church universal that the theologians did not have to worry much in the short term about the limits of the scientific viewpoint. Douglass (Douglass and Brunner 1935: 34) was perfectly content therefore to:* ▲

- *accept dependable statistics as a reasonable measure of institutional strength. It is not above thinking that, under a voluntary system of human association, the tests of the survival of an institution, of numerical growth, of gains in participation on the part of both leaders and the rank and file, of financial support, and of public recognition, constitute a battery of valid criteria for judging institutional health and power.*

*Membership growth and decline was, accordingly, a key dependent variable for Douglass. As we have seen, rural and urban population changes were the major cause of decline for existing congregations in his work; and along with appropriate new church development (i.e., planting the kind of congregation that fit a local homogeneous unit) the development of social fellowship and social welfare programming was the major vehicle of adaptation (i.e., cause of growth) in the urban frontier. Do these remain significant correlates of growth today? And, how do they compare with more contemporary contenders? Rodney, Roger and Larry (i.e., Stark and Finke 2000; Iannaccone 1994) would be appropriately upset with me if I put forward anything other than "strictness" as the top contemporary contender. Fortunately the FACT survey includes a relatively direct measure of it. And as a relative new comer, but increasingly highlighted and strong contender (Hadaway and Roozen 1995; Don Miller 1997), the FACT study suggests we should include contemporary worship in a test of correlates of growth. The single best FACT measure for this is the use of "electronic guitars" in worship.*

*So what do we find in the FACT data of Protestant congregations when we correlate the following four measures with change in a congregations total adult participants over the last five years: 1) 1990-2000 zip code population change; 2) the breadth of internal programming; 3) strictness and 4) the use of electric guitars in worship? Perhaps not surprisingly with over 11,000 Protestant cases we find that all produce significant, zero order Pearson Correlation coefficients. They range from a low of .118 to a high of .272. None of these are particularly large, but at least the top two are strong enough to warrant our attention. Perhaps most surprisingly, it is population change at the bottom .118 and breadth of social programming at the top .272. Strictness ranks second lowest at .158 and electronic guitars ranks second highest at .206.*

*I have argued elsewhere (Roozen 2001, forthcoming) that contemporary forms of worship, whose positive correlation with growth is even stronger in oldline Protestantism than conservative Protestantism, may be the first generally applicable adaptive strategy appearing in oldline Protestantism for the generationally carried social changes that have driven membership declines for over a quarter of a century. To the extent that I am correct, I think that Douglass would be pleased to learn that two adaptive strategies sit at the top of our growth correlates.*

*Social change may be the driver, but congregations are capable of adaptive responses. While strictness may have to be downgraded a notch, supply-siders and church leaders should nevertheless be pleased with the dominance of institutional factors. Those given to market models, however, should note as Douglass showed 70 years ago that supply can change through the adaptation of existing firms as well as the entry of entirely new firms. ▲*

*In contrast to Douglass' neglect of culture, the significance of strictness and worship in today's growth equation should underscore what I take as the critical importance of our discipline's recent turn to organizational identity. Additionally, let me suggest that the importance of worship for today's congregation may just prompt religious researchers to let God (or the gods) back into the social scientific study of religion.*

*Ammerman's (1997a) Congregations and Community suggests that the most critical (not the only, only the most crucial) factor in those congregations that were able to positively adapt to community changes was the pastoral leadership, most particularly the ability of the pastor to imagine the possibility for change. This focus on the clergy leader brings me to the final change over the last 70 years that I want to highlight. One of the major subjects of Douglass' research was clergy leadership, and one of the most straightforward measures he used for this was their level of education, with whether or not they had a college degree being a particularly prominent marker for Douglass. I think it fair to say that in the latter regard Douglass was less than pleased with what he saw for two respects. First, he was concerned that an estimated 40% of Protestant ministers had less than a college education. Second, he was concerned that the level of education was actually declining because of the extremely low formal education of frontier pastors. At first glance, Douglass should be extremely pleased with what FACT found in regard to the educational level of the senior or sole pastors of the responding Protestant congregations. For one thing, the FACT data shows that regional differences in Protestant clergy education have shrunk considerably and are almost negligible within oldline Protestantism. Second, the FACT data shows that the 40% of Protestant clergy that did not have college educations in Douglass' day has shrunk to under 20% today, and that the percentage of oldline Protestant clergy with college degrees has risen from about 75% in Douglass' day to 95% today.*

*That's the good news. However, the FACT data does pose a yet to be explained dilemma for those in praise of high levels of ministerial education. On the potentially positive side the FACT data shows that seminary educated clergy are more likely than non-seminary educated clergy to use literary and media references in their preaching and to serve in congregations with high levels of ecumenical involvement. But the data also shows a null to negative relationship between seminary educated clergy and a congregation's sense of vitality, clarity of purpose, membership growth, confidence about the future and ability to deal with conflict. And even after applying a series of controls, including for denominational family, the null to negative relationships remain.*

*Theological educators, as one can imagine, have not been particularly receptive to this FACT finding. But I trust that sociologically oriented readers will appreciate the apparent simplicity of the reason why a seminary education has little to do with organizational vitality and adaptation. The real irony is that Douglass reported it over 70 years ago and I fear it is one those things that has not changed over time. Specifically, Douglass reports that of all the subjects covered in a*

*survey of 53 seminaries, Sociology ranked last in terms of course offerings. When will theological education get the message that a diverse, voluntaristic and changing world requires the shift from a philosophically oriented, historical theology to a sociologically reflexive, practical theology?* ▲

### **Conclusion**

*Whatever else a group may be that regularly congregates to worship its god, Douglass shared the belief of most, if not all readers of this journal, that this group is a social institution and therefore lends itself to social scientific analysis. More importantly, Douglass' pioneering work in the social scientific study of religious institutions was driven by the belief that the programs and policy of religious organizations could benefit from this scientific perspective. In the spirit of the latter belief, let me conclude with what Douglass might say if he were here today. I think he would say, "If you want the church's adaptive choices to be rational, pay particular attention to the following four, closely inter-related edges of the new paradigm:*

*(1) The church's image of unity. Can the church shift its thinking from homogeneity on the one hand and inclusiveness on the other hand to some model of ecological pluralism?*

*(2) The church's embrace of political realism in its own decision making. Can the church shift from the dogmatic on the one hand and the prophetic on the other hand to an open and honest embrace of the political negotiation of its internal differences?*

*(3) The limits of the church's rationality. Can the church, especially more Calvinistic oriented Protestants, shift from formal objectifications of the WORD to an expressive subjectivity in its negotiation of religious authority?*

*(4) The contextualization of the church's primary purpose. Can the church balance its pre-occupation with mission with a re-appropriation of identity sustaining social fellowship and identity transforming worship as both the engines of early 21st century congregational vitality and the church's most significant contribution to the public good.?"*

*Thank you, H. Paul Douglass!* ▲

### **REFERENCES**

*Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 1997a. Congregation & Community. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.*

*1997b. "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream. Pp.196-216 in Lived Religion in America, edited by David Hall. Princeton: Princeton University Press.*

*Ammerman, Nancy T., Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, eds.1998. Studying Congregations: A New Handbook. Nashville: Abingdon Press.*

Becker, Penny Edgell. 1999. *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*. Cambridge University Press.

Brewer, Earl D. C. and Douglas W. Johnson. 1970. *An Inventory of the Harlan Paul Douglass Collection of Religious Research Reports*. New York: Department of Research, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Brunner, Edmund deS. 1959a. "Harlan Paul Douglass: Pioneer Researcher in the Sociology of Religion." *Part I. Review of Religious Research 1*: 3-16.

1959b. "Harlan Paul Douglass: Pioneer Researcher in the Sociology of Religion." *Part II. Review of Religious Research 1*: 63-75.

Carroll, Jackson W. 2000. "Reflexive Ecclesiology: A Challenge to Applied Research in Religious Organizations." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 39*: 545-558.

Carroll, Jackson W., Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, eds. 1986. *Handbook for Congregational Studies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 

Chaves, Mark. 1998. *National Congregations Study*.  
<http://saint-denis.library.arizona.edu/natcong>

Douglas, Ann. 1995. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1930s*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Douglass, H. Paul. 1926. *1000 City Churches*. New York: George H. Doran.

Douglass, H. Paul and Edmund deS Brunner. 1935. *The Protestant Church as a Social Institution*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Ebaugh, Helen Rose and Janet Saltzman Chafetz. 2000. *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Eiesland, Nancy L. 2000. *A Particular Place: Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Hadaway, C. Kirk and David A. Roozen. 1995. *Rerouting the Protestant mainstream: Sources of Growth and Opportunities for Change*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Hadden, Jeffrey K. 1980. "H. Paul Douglass: His Perspective and His Work" *Review of Religious Research 22*: 66-88.

Hocking, William E., Chairman. 1932. *Rethinking Missions: A layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Hoge, Dean R. and David A. Roozen, eds. 1979. *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*. New York: Pilgrim Press. ▲

Holifield, E. Brooks. 1994. "Toward a History of American Congregations." Pp. 23-53 in *American Congregations, Vol 2: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, edited by James P. Wind and James W. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1994. "Why Strict Churches are Strong." *American Journal of Sociology* 99: 1180-1211.

Kelley, Dean M. 1972. *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

McGavern, Donald A. 1970. *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Maloney, H. Newton. 1983. "A Framework for Understanding and Helping the Church: Organizational Development." Pp 175-191 in *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church*, edited by Carl S. Dudley. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Miller, Donald E. 1997. *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Powell, Walter W., and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Roof, Wade Clark and William McKinney. 1987. *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Roozen, David A. 2001. *Four Mega-Trends Changing America's Religious Landscape*.

Presented at the Religion Newswriters Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, September, 2001. Available at: <http://fact.hartsem.edu> ▲

Forthcoming "Three Sources of American Religious Renewal." *Christian Century*.

Roozen, David A. and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. 1993. *Church and Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Roozen, David A., Carl S. Dudley and Scott Thumma. 2000. *Faith Communities Today*. <http://fact.hartsem.edu>

Smylie, James H. 1979. "Church Growth and Decline in Historical Perspective: Protestant Quest for Identity, Leadership and Meaning. Pp. 69-93 in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*, edited by Hoge and Roozen. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Swatos, William H., Jr. Guest editor. 1999. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol 60 - No. 3. Special Issue: *The Secularization Debate*.

Wagner, C. Peter. 1976. *Your Church Can Grow*. Glendale, CA: G/L Regal Books.

Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. "Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1044-93.

Warner, R. Stephen, and Judith G. Wittner, eds. 1998. *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Williams, Rhys H., Guest editor. 1996. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol 57 - No. 1. Special Issue: *Sociology of Culture and Sociology of Religion*. 

Woolever, Cynthia A. 2001. *U.S. Congregational Life Survey Project*.  
<http://www.uscongregations.org>

Wuthnow, Robert, 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert, 1997. "The Cultural Turn: Stories, Logics, and the Quest for Identity in American Religion." Pp 245-266 in *Contemporary American Religion: An Ethnographic Reader*, edited by Penny Edgell Becker and Nancy L. Eisland. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Perhaps the most direct line is from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research to its predecessor body, The Hartford Seminary Center for Social and Religious Research, whose founding director was Jackson W. Carroll. Prior to coming to Hartford, Carroll co-directed the Center for Religious Research at Emory University's Candler School of Theology with Earl D. C. Brewer. When on leave from Emory in the late 1960s, Brewer compiled the only published inventory to the Harlan Paul Douglass Collection of Religious Research Reports, archived in the Department of Research, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (Brewer and Johnson, 1970), the NCC Department of Research being the most direct organizational successor to Douglass' Institute for Religious Research.

2. The FACT survey and related dissemination was designed with four specific constituencies in mind. In order of priority these included: (1) lay and clergy leaders of congregations; (2)

*resourcers of congregations, especially denominational leaders; (3) the public through the media; and (4) scholars.*

*3. In Douglass' writings, "activities" tend to be informal; "programs" formalized organized activities*

*4. For a brief history of OD's movement into parish consultation see Maloney (1983).*

*5. I use 1927 as my cut-point because it is the mid-point of Douglass' Institute's 13 year life span*