Jonathan Schechter – "Corpus Callosum" Column
***Jackson Hole News&Guide* – December 24, 2012**

We've just entered what is arguably each year's most schizophrenic week. Tomorrow is the second holiest day in Christendom; seven days from now, the planet will enjoy what is arguably its most hedonistic night of the year.

From that perspective, thank goodness this column is being published the day before Christmas. Why? Because I'm writing about religiosity, and the data strongly suggest that Jackson Hole's God of choice is Bacchus. Best read this soon, while there's still a whiff of the sacred in the air.

Every ten years the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) uses the occasion of the decennial Census to determine the religiosity of every county in America. Although logistically complex, the idea is simple: divide the number of regular church-goers into a county's population, and you determine its religiosity.

The ASARB survey has two great strengths. One is that it uses the same methodology in every county, and has done so since 1980. As a result, the data can be compared "apples to apples," whether across borders or time. The other is the survey's comprehensiveness, for it attempts to count all the members of every congregation in every religion in every county.

The word "attempts" gives a clue about the survey's weaknesses, however: The study misses some congregations; those congregations it does identify self-report their attendees ("adherents" in ASARB-speak); and not all identified congregations provide adherent counts. Because the under- and over-counting kinda-sorta balance out, though, the results can be considered representative at worst, and generally accurate at best.

What do the findings tell us about Teton County's religiosity? Seven things, one for every day of this schizophrenic week.

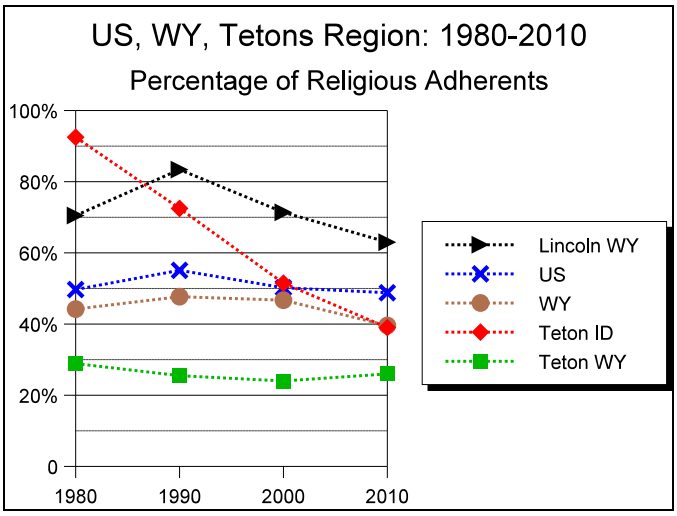
1. Jackson Hole residents may be spiritual, but we're not very religious. (Graph 1)

The 2010 ASARB survey found that only 26 percent of Teton County residents are adherents in any congregation. This is barely half the national average, and puts us in the bottom six percent of all counties nationally. We've been in this range for the last 30 years, and likely longer.

In contrast, both the state of Wyoming and the region's other counties have much higher religiosity counts.

2. Teton County's secular tendencies are spreading to neighboring counties. (Graph 1)

One of the consequence of Jackson residents moving west to Idaho and south to Star Valley is a drop in those counties' religiosity.



Graph 1

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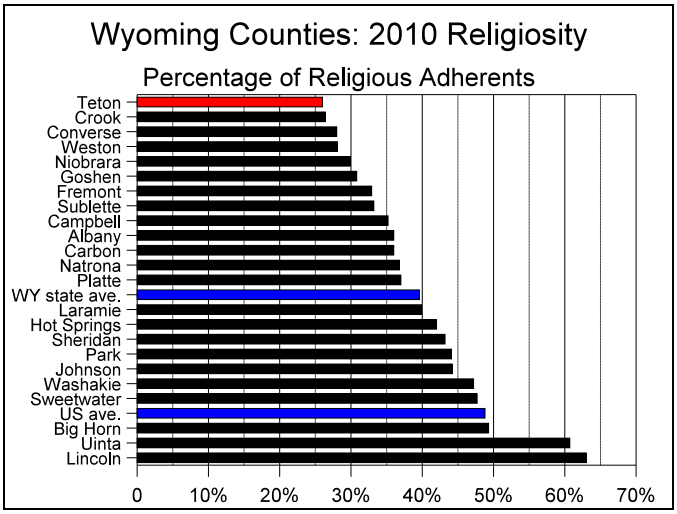
3. Teton is the least religious county in Wyoming. (Graph 2)

The Latter-Day Saints strongholds of Lincoln and Uinta counties have Wyoming's highest religiosity scores; the lightly-populated counties along the state's eastern boundary compete with Teton for low religiosity.



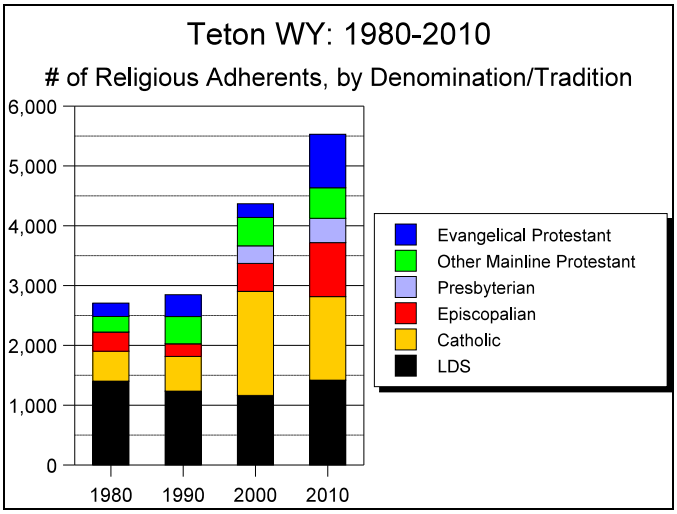
Graph 2

4. Jackson Hole's Mormon population has stayed stable for 30 years. (Graph 3)

In contrast, Catholic adherents have grown with our Hispanic population; and there has been rapid growth in Protestant adherents, particularly in the Episcopalian church and a variety of Evangelical congregations.

5. Our neighboring counties are deeply Mormon. (Graph 4)

In Teton County, Idaho, Latter-Day Saints account for roughly seven of every eight religious adherents; in Lincoln County, Wyoming, the figure is roughly five of every six. In Teton County, Wyoming, it's one in four



Graph 3

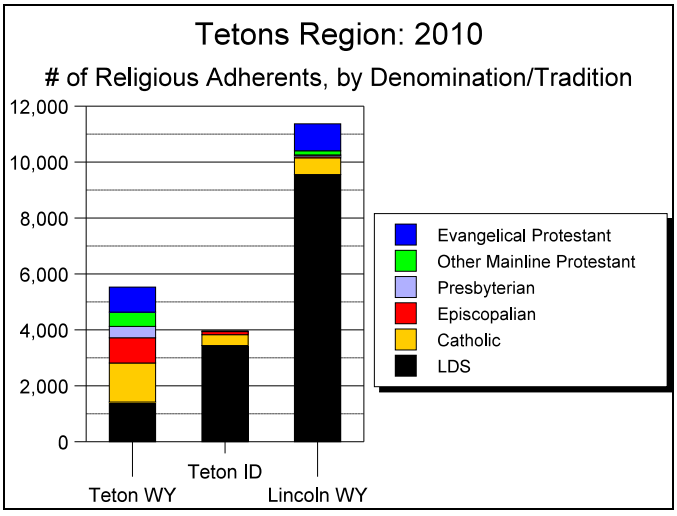
6. Compared to the nation, Jackson Hole is disproportionately Mormon and disproportionately mainline Protestant. (Graph 5)

Here's a good example of where the ASARB findings need to be taken with a grain of salt, for their 2010 count did not show any Jews in Teton County. This is clearly not the case. That noted, the overall results still pass the smell test, which is what really matters in an exercise like this one.

7. Wherever Teton County residents end up in the afterlife, they will likely be joined by a lot of ski bums. (Graph 6)

Looking at other counties with major ski areas, as well as a couple of well-to-do summer resorts, the only one which has a higher religiosity score than the U.S. average is Summit County, Utah, the location of Park City. Which is not surprising, given that every county in Utah has a higher religiosity score than the U.S. average.

From my family to yours, may you have the happiest of holidays, and the most wonderful of new years.



Graph 4

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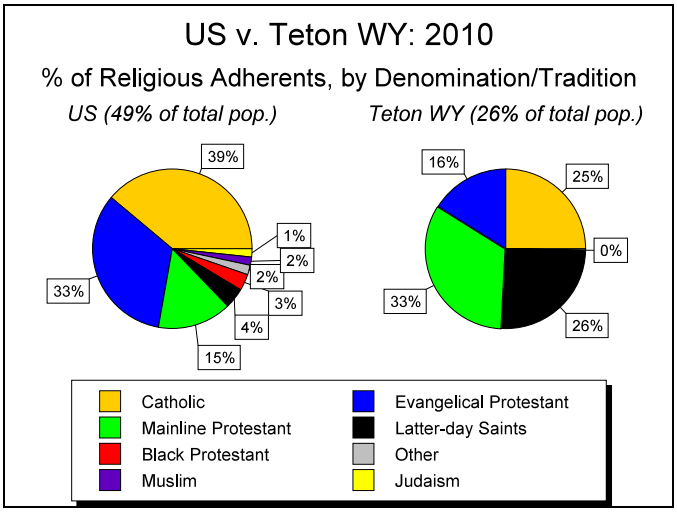
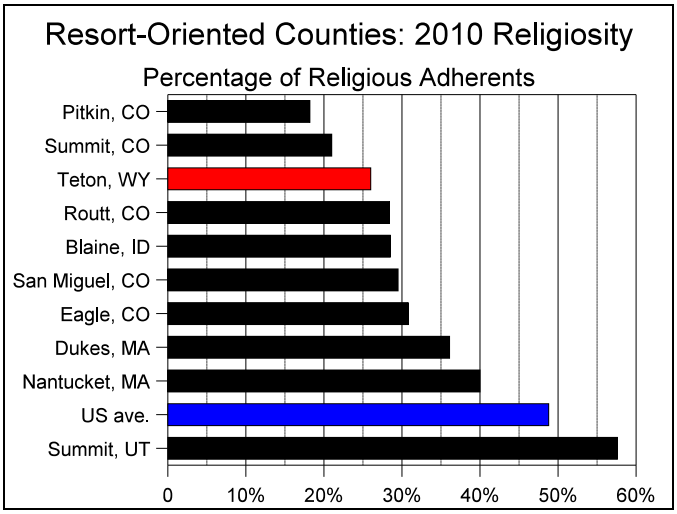


Graph 5



Graph 6

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