

Letters

Collegeville, Pa.

Jan. 11, 1967

Dear Editor,

The article on religious town names by Brunn and Wheeler in the Dec. Names seems to have a serious fault in the extremely loose use of the term *religious*. Unless there was far more analysis of the term *religious* than appears from the text or footnotes, such conclusions as are reached in the article seem wholly to lack validity. To call any name which happens to occur in the Bible a religious name is sadly uncritical. Sparta (only in the apocrypha), Syracuse (where does it occur in the Bible?), Corinth, Rome, Alexandria, Athens are not religious names at all unless it can be shown that those who named the American towns of those names actually were motivated by their Biblical use to do so. Mary, Peter, Philip, David, etc. were nine times out of ten used as place names to honor some settler who bore that name. Such naming has *no* religious significance. Lebanon, Bethel, Goshen and the like as well as the 'Saint' names are in a different category; they may be presumed to be religious unless known in specific cases to be otherwise. Even here probably more Salems or Canaans are named from the home towns of settlers from the seaboard states than from a fresh religious motive.

To find out whether a name may properly be called religious requires a search into the origin of each place separately, an exceedingly lengthy and sometimes fruitless task. It was surprising too to find no attempt made to coordinate the discussion in the article with such studies as Gaustad's "Historical Atlas of Religion in America."

Sincerely,

Donald Baker

October 17, 1967

Dear Editor:

We feel that several points raised in Mr. Baker's letter are worthy of some additional explanation.

First, as the definition of the term *religious*, we feel that our choice for the inclusion of particular names is stated well on p. 198, beginning line 13. We realize fully that in dealing with names of towns in an area the size of the U.S. there may be many reasons why a particular name is given to a settlement. This difficulty is true whether one is delimiting the spatial patterns of the names of religious towns, topographic features, or ethnic words that appear in the physical or cultural landscape. Our statement that we are aware of this difficulty is stated p. 197, beginning line 6. Mr. Baker might examine similar studies listed in footnotes 1, 2, and 3 and note the scope of the investigations.

Second, Mr. Baker should realize our purpose in examining the spatial arrangement of towns with *religious* names. This is stated on p. 198, beginning line 6 and on p. 199, line 2.

Third, our choice for calling a name *religious* is stated beginning line 13, p. 198 and in footnote 4. See also the appropriate statements in the second paragraph on page 199. According to the references we consulted for the study (listed in footnote 4), Sparta is a religious town name. Syracuse appears in Acts 28:12. Corinth, Rome, etc., satisfy town names of type (1) defined on lines 5 and 6, p. 199. Our purpose was *not* to attach religious significance to those names but observe what the major areal patterns tell us about population migration and settlement patterns.

Fourth, we agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Baker's first sentence in the last paragraph. We are sure other investigators would also agree.

Fifth, a most unfortunate omission was Gaustad's atlas. We were aware of it but omitted it from a footnote.

Respectfully,

Stanley D. Brunn and James O. Wheeler