

Religion in the United States (Christiano et al., chapter 4)

Churches & sects: definitions vary but sects are usually defined as having more tension with their cultural environment than churches. The path from sect to church has been an important research topic.

Denominations: Originally used of non-established churches in England, now the major religious form in the United States and other “free-market” environments.

Denominations have become less important as the conservative-liberal split has become more important

Congregations: Important focus of religious life. Congregationalism is most popular system of church governance in the U.S.

Religious composition: Most Americans identify as Christians.

The proportion of “no preference” (16.8%) is small vs. other Western nations. Non-Christian religions make up just 8.2%

Over the past several decades liberal and mainline denominations have lost membership, while evangelical denominations have grown. Sociologists disagree about the relative importance of birthrates vs. denominational recruitment/attrition/switching.

Evangelicals & Fundamentalists: The terms aren't used consistently. Christiano et al. view soteriology as key, viz. accepting Jesus as “personal Lord and Savior”

Fundamentalists are more sect-like and separatist.