

RELIGION

The US is well known for its many traditional churches and less formal religions, though almost all are Christian. Freedom of worship is a result of the separation of Church and State that is written into the First Amendment of the Constitution. This happened because many people, including the Pilgrim Fathers, went to America to avoid religious persecution in Europe.

American Protestants are very religious, though the Catholic Church has more members than any one Protestant group. Religious beliefs are strong: it is said that 96% of Americans believe in God, 90% pray and 41% go to church regularly. Churches are centers of social events and business activities, as well as places of worship. Prayers are said at football games, and some teams kneel together on the field before a game.

Church and State

There is no established religion in the US but Christianity is built into some important aspects of American life. The Pledge of Allegiance includes the phrase 'one nation under God', and the official US motto is 'In God We Trust'. US presidents always attend church regularly, but they may come from any denomination.

Since the 1960s some Americans have tried to stop government support of religion. In 1963 the Supreme Court decided it was 'unconstitutional' for students to say the Lord's Prayer or to read the Bible in class. Many schools have ignored this ruling. In 1997 a judge in Alabama was ordered to remove a list of the Ten Commandments from the wall of his court, but he refused.

Christian churches

In the US the Catholic Church has over 60 million members. The largest Protestant group are the Baptists, with nearly 37 million members. Other Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians. Episcopalians, who are part of the Anglican Communion, number only 2.5 million. Part of the Deep South is called the Bible Belt because Protestants there are fundamentalists. Their preaching is sometimes rudely called 'Bible-bashing'.

People who have not found spiritual satisfaction within the traditional churches may join a sect such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Scientists, the Mormons or the Seventh-Day Adventists. Others join a charismatic church, such as the Pentecostal Church, where emotions are freely expressed and spiritual healing is practised. In the US there are over 10 million Pentecostals. Smaller churches in the US include the Shakers, the Amish, the Mennonites and the Hutterites. America also has strong religious groups that are not churches, for example the Promise Keepers.

The US has many evangelical churches, which believe that Christians should help others find God. Evangelists such as Billy Sunday, Aimee Semple McPherson and Billy Graham have gathered groups of followers through the strength of their personalities. But some, including televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert, have shown that they care more about money and other pleasures than about God.

America also has many religious cults. They include the Moonies and the large and financially successful Scientology organization. Other groups have shown themselves to be fanatical and dangerous, as seen in the violent deaths in 1993 of more than 70 people at the Branch Davidians' house in Waco, Texas.

Other faiths

The main non-Christian faiths in the US are Judaism and Islam. The US has about 6 million Jews and there are synagogues in many towns and cities. Jewish men may be recognized in the street if they are wearing a skullcap. Men from some branches of Judaism wear long black coats and black hats.

from *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*)

- **MATCHING**

Match the words with their meanings.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. denomination | a/ Protestant members who believe the exact words of the Bible |
| 2. fundamentalists | b/ buildings where Jews worship |
| 3. preaching | c/ religious group |
| 4. synagogues | d/ the Muslim religion |
| 5. Islam | e/ teaching |

- **Write T for true and F for false. Correct the false statements.**

1. It is stated in the Constitution that religion and government are separate.
2. Most Americans believe in God
3. The Catholic church is the largest religion.
4. The official church in the US is Christianity.
5. American Presidents go to church regularly
6. Football players and students are requested to read the Bible.
7. The majority of American population belong to Protestant churches.
8. The largest group of Protestant Christians in the US is Methodist.
9. The Mormons is one of the traditional religious groups
10. Religious cults may be dangerous

- **Define these terms, using a dictionary if necessary.**

Pilgrim fathers
scientology
sect
cult

• **CLOZE**

Choose one appropriate word from the box below to complete each blank space.

<i>denominations</i>	<i>largest</i>	<i>government</i>	<i>Moslem</i>	<i>worship</i>
<i>religion</i>	<i>group</i>	<i>tribal</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>divided</i>

A basic American principle is separation of church and state. The US Constitution says that people have the right to1.... as they choose and that no religion can be made the official religion. In keeping with this principle,2.... money cannot be used to support church activities and prayers may not be said in public schools. (The US Congress, however, opens each year with a prayer.)

Studies show that about 9 in 10 Americans identify with a3.... and that about 6 in 10 belong to a church.

About 94 percent of Americans who identify with a religion are4..... Among Christians, there are more Protestants than Catholics. However, there are many different Protestant ...5....., or groups. For example, Protestants include, among others, Baptists, Methodists, and Lutherans, and each of these groups is ...6..... into smaller groups. So Catholics, although outnumbered by Protestants, are the single ...7..... religious group.

Jews are the largest non-Christian8....., with about 4 percent of the population. About 2 percent of the population is9....., and smaller numbers are Buddhists, and Hindus. Native Americans often preserve their10..... religions.

DID YOU KNOW?

the Pledge of Allegiance: a promise of loyalty made by Americans to their flag and country. The words are: 'I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' It was first published in 1892 in the magazine Youth's Companion and written by the journalist Francis Bellamy. Congress added the words 'under God' in 1954 and this caused a lot of argument. Many American children say the Pledge each morning at school as they face the flag and put their right hands over their hearts. Adults also often do this on formal public occasions.

the Bible Belt: a name sometimes used to describe the US Deep South and parts of the Midwest because many people there are religious Protestants who follow the words of the Bible very closely.

Christian Scientist: a person who believes in Christian Science, a form of Christianity started by Mary Baker Eddy in Boston, US, in 1879. She said that the mind is the only thing that is real, that the physical world is just an illusion, and that suffering and death can be overcome by prayer alone. Christian Scientists do not take medicine or go into hospital, but talk to a Christian Science Practitioner who helps them deal with their illness. They have no priests, and their services are very simple, consisting of readings from the Bible and the works of Mary Baker Eddy, religious songs, and accounts from people who have been cured.

Mormon: a member of the Christian religion called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It was established in the US in New York State in 1830 by Joseph Smith. Its members later moved west, led by Brigham Young, to establish Salt Lake City and the state of Utah. Their center is still in Salt Lake City, and most people in Utah are Mormons. The church has about 10 million members, and they are well known in many countries for visiting people in their homes to talk about their religion. Mormons have strict moral rules and do not drink alcohol or even coffee. At one time Mormon men were allowed to have more than one wife, but the Church stopped this in 1890.

Seventh-Day Adventist: a member of a Christian religious group that was established in 1860. They have their sabbath (= the day of the week when they rest and worship God) on Saturday instead of Sunday, and they believe that Christ will soon return to earth. They are well known for their strict religious rules.

Pentecostalist: a member of any of the Protestant Pentecostal religious groups or churches. They believe that illnesses can be healed by faith and in 'baptism in the spirit' in which a person 'speaks in tongues' with unknown words that come from the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism began in the US at the beginning of the 20th century and now has support in other major Christian Churches. The largest Pentecostal church in the US is the Church of God in Christ, with more than 5.5 million members.

Evangelist: a Protestant Christian who travels to different places and holds religious meetings to persuade people to become Christians.

Televangelist: an evangelist who has a series of religious programmes on television. Many have become very rich from money sent in by supporters.

Branch Davidians: a US religious group, based in Waco, Texas which believed that Christ would soon return to earth. Their leader was David Koresh. In 1993 members of the group killed four US government officers who were trying to enter their building. The building was then surrounded for 51 days until the Branch Davidians began a fire in which 82 of them died (33 from Britain).

Sources

Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, OUP 1999

Wikipedia - The free Encyclopedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States