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# Religions and Immigration in the United States

(Source : "Population and the Future" ("Population & Avenir"), n°. 706, January-February, 2012, [www.population-demographie.org/revue03.htm](http://www.population-demographie.org/revue03.htm); [www.cairn.info/revue-population-et-avenir.htm](http://www.cairn.info/revue-population-et-avenir.htm))

by Gérard-François DUMONT

In all countries, the number of people counted as members of various religions evolves according to the number of individuals who claim their membership in a certain religion and those who distance themselves from a religion. In the United States this type of evolution is particularly dependent on immigration, which causes important changes in the repartition of the religious population.

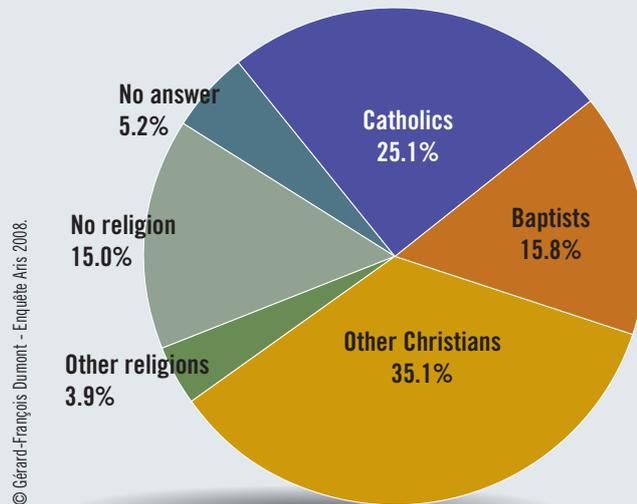
In considering the religious repartition in the most populous country of America, the Christian religion continues to dominate, since three-quarters of the U.S. population consider themselves "Christian", while 15% declare "without religion", 3.9% declare a "non-Christian religion", 5.2 give "no reponse"<sup>1</sup>.

However, within the Christian group, the evolution of various sub-groups shows marked differences. From 2001 to 2008, the number of Catholics increased by a percentage superior to the national demographic increase of adults (12.4% and 9.7% respectively), while the number of Protestants increased less than the national increase (7% versus 9.7% respectively). One element which explains this evolution, favorable to the Catholics, is the Latin-American and Philippine immigrations, which are composed largely of Catholics.

Within the category of Protestant religions, this migratory phenomenon also has an effect. (Other factors may also play a role, such as the abandoning of a religion, for the group indicating "without religion" increased by 13.6%.) In fact, along with certain Protestant religions (evangelical, Pentecostal and Adventist) and Jehovah's Witnesses, which all increase their numbers chiefly by conversion, the rise in Orthodox Christians (27.8%) should be noted. This is the result mainly of immigration from the countries of Orthodox Europe, following the collapse of the Iron Curtain. On the contrary, the Lutherans (-9.5%), the Presbyterians (-15.6%), and the Anglicans (-30.3%) are all on the decrease, these religions being implanted in countries which furnish almost no more immigrants to the U.S., namely, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, in addition to the migratory phenomenon should be noted a higher-than-average birth rate among the Mennonites (26.6%) and the Mormons (17.1%).

## 1. THE RELIGIOUS REPARTITION OF THE U.S. POPULATION



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As for non-Christian religions, their members increased more (13.6%) than both the national increase and that of the Christian churches. Within this sub-category, sharp differences should also be noted: In effect, growth of the Sikhs from India is very high (36.8%) even though their actual numbers remain small (78,000 in 2008). The rise is less dramatic for the Muslims (22.2%), but their actual number is higher (1,349,000), due to immigrations coming in particular from the Indian subcontinent, from the Middle East (in particular Lebanon) and the Muslim countries of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, Senegal<sup>2</sup>. The number of Buddhists showed an increase (9.9%) just slightly above the national increase, but with an important minority, with 1,189,000 members. On the contrary, the number of Jews diminishes (-5.5%) to stabilize at 2,680,000 in 2008. It is true that the large waves of Jewish immigration to the United States, a result of the pogroms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe, then the Shoah, and finally the expulsion of the Jews from the Arab countries, such as Egypt in 1956, are finished. On the other hand, American Jews can make their *aliya* (ascension), that is, emigrate to Israel, an emigration which has been greatly facilitated by the Law of Return voted in 1950 by Israel and which gives all Jews the right to immigrate to Israel and to become citizens.

Thus, an analysis of religions in the United States sheds some light on the migratory system of this country. Noteworthy is the fact that the Chinese immigration is not shown ; on the one hand it may be that this immigration has been divided among various religions and, on the other hand, 11.2 million inhabitants of the United States chose not to answer the question. ●

(translation: C. Knutson-Beveraggi)

1. The ARIS Survey, concerned with the adult population, is based on declarations made by respondents themselves, and not on figures given by the religious groups. The survey studies 32 types of Christians, 11 non-Christian religions and 5 types of individuals without religion. Surprisingly, the survey classes all Muslims in one category without distinguishing, for example, Sunnis from Shi'ites.

2. Dumont, Gérard-François, Seydou Kanté, "Senegalese Immigration" ("L'émigration sénégalaise") in : Morinaux, Vincent (editor), "Mobilities" ("Les mobilités"), Paris, Sedes, 2010.

