

(Download pdf) American Religion: Contemporary Trends

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Mark Chaves

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#866521 in Books Mark Chaves 2013-08-25 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.40 x .60 x 5.40l, 1.00 #File Name: 0691159661160 pages American Religion | File size: 16.Mb

Mark Chaves : American Religion: Contemporary Trends before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Religion: Contemporary Trends:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Little Good News for America's Religious Leaders By George P. Wood American Religion by Mark Chaves contains little good news for America's religious leaders. Subtitled Contemporary Trends, the book examines continuity and discontinuity in American religious belief and practice over the last 40 years. While there are significant points of continuity in this time period--of belief in God and weekly

attendance at religious services, for example--overall, the trend is toward discontinuity. "The religious trends I have documented point to a straightforward general conclusion," Chaves writes: "no indicator of traditional religious belief or practice is going up" (emphasis in the original). Chaves' primary data sets are the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Congregations Study (NCS), which he directed. Both surveys were conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. GSS has been conducted annually since 1972 and NCS in 1998 and 2006-7. Chaves is professor of sociology, religion, and divinity at Duke University, and his book is published by Princeton University Press. The book is brief (160 pages), but its data, author, and publisher make it an authoritative text whose conclusions religious leaders must wrestle with. Here are some of those conclusions:

- * America is increasingly a religiously diverse nation, with a rising number of religiously unaffiliated persons--the so-called "nones" (chapter 2).
- * Americans' religious beliefs show remarkable continuity, except in the area of biblical inerrancy, which is declining (chapter 3).
- * American religious involvement, measured by weekly attendance at a religious service is stable but softening (chapter 4).
- * American congregations are shaped by "the same cultural, social, and economic pressures affecting American life and institutions more generally" and can be seen in six trends: "looser connections between congregations and denominations, more computer technology, more informal worship, older congregants, more high-income and college-educated congregants, and...more people concentrated in very large churches" (chapter 5).
- * American religious leadership is a career choice for fewer and fewer people, and its ranks are older and less esteemed as professionals than they used to be (chapter 6).
- * Liberal Protestant denominations are declining but liberal religious ideas are increasing in influence. The decline in liberal Protestant denominations is not explained by transfer growth to conservative Protestant denominations. Rather, liberal Protestants are becoming "nones," largely because of the increasing identification of religion and conservative politics (chapter 7).
- * American religiosity is increasingly identified with social and political conservatism. On abortion, the most religiously active become increasingly conservative. But on gay marriage, the most religiously active liberalize at a pace slower than the religious population. Either way, the most religious active Americans are more conservative than the less religiously active (chapter 8).

Chapter 9 summarizes the book's findings this way: "If there is a trend, it is toward less religion." Chaves' is ambivalent about whether this trend is good or bad for America as a whole. On the one hand, he writes, "Increased tolerance of, even appreciation for, religions other than one's own, described in chapter 2, is good news for our increasingly pluralistic society." On the other hand, "Countering this positive trend...is the increasing attitudinal difference between the more religious and the less religious." He goes on to write, "It would be ironic and unfortunate if Americans' increasing appreciation for religions other than their own becomes overwhelmed by increasing hostility between the more and the less religious." There is another danger in the trend of religious non-affiliation. Chaves writes: "If half of all the social capital in America--meaning half of all the face-to-face associational activity, personal philanthropy, and volunteering--happens through religious institutions, the vitality of those institutions influences more than American religious life. Weaker religious institutions would mean a different kind of American civic life." As I noted at the outset, there is little good news for America's religious leaders in Mark Chaves' book. The trend is toward less religion. One could accentuate the positives and say that less religion means less nominal religion and more authentic religion, and perhaps there's something to that. But in accentuating the positive, we shouldn't overlook the very considerable negatives, mainly, less religion and more political antagonism to religion. Of course, the New Testament church faced even greater odds and nonetheless grew in size and influence. But they were converting pagans to the faith of Jesus Christ. Can we experience a similar revival in a post-Christian society? In my opinion, that's the fundamental question the American church needs to answer. And if yes, how? That's the fundamental challenge facing American religious leaders today.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Handy, albeit slim

By Esau This is a remarkably clear little book that presents a concise, well-organized survey of sociological trends in American religious practice (read: Christian practice--Chaves points out the statistical near-irrelevance of other faiths in a broad survey like this). It uses readily available data to re-examine trends we thought we knew, such as church attendance metrics and the political affiliations of church attendees, and to disabuse us of several "widely known" received wisdoms. What I find most remarkable is that Chaves deals with a huge scope so modestly and briefly, without any apparent loss of clarity. I found myself wishing for twenty or thirty more pages extrapolation--a rare thing, given the fondness of most academics for seeing their own opinions on the page.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. the story of how American religion has changed since 1972.

By Greg Smith (aka somewhatfaith) American Religion: Contemporary Trends is a must read for anyone interested in gaining a richer understanding of how American religion has changed since 1972. The book is both so well crafted and so timely that I am naming it as the first book to find its way onto what will become my Top 10 Books of 2011 (the 2010 list can be found here). The book relies on data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Congregations Study (NCS). The GSS is considered to be the starting point for any research on societal trends, since it has been conducted at least every other year since 1972. The NCS, which Chaves directed, was a national survey of "religious congregations across the religious spectrum" conducted in 1998 and again in 2006-7 (p.5). The data from this research suggests that religious trends in America over the last four decades can be summarized as follows: "there is much continuity, and there is some decline, but no traditional religious belief or practice has increased in recent decades"

(p.14).Seven topical chapters provide incredible insight into American religion. A quote of interest from each is included below.*Diversity - "Americans have become more accepting of religious diversity and more appreciative of religions other than their own" (p.26).*Belief - "When it comes to Americans' religiosity, the only thing that may be increasing slightly is what we might call diffuse spirituality" (p.37-8).*Involvement - ". . . the basic story about religious service attendance is that it declined in the several decades leading up to 1990 but probably has been essentially stable thereafter" (p. 49).*Congregations - ". . . the number of Protestants attending independent congregations has increased from 14% in 1989 to 19% in 2006. If the unaffiliated congregations were all in one denomination, they would constitute the second largest number of participants (behind only the Roman Catholic Church) and the largest in number of congregations" (p.57-8).*Leaders - "The average age for ordination for male clergy is now 31; for women it is 38" (p.75).*Liberal Protestant Decline - "The trend is striking. Since 1972, the percentage of Americans affiliated with theologically more liberal, mainline denominations has steadily declined while the percentage affiliated with more conservative, evangelical denominations increased slightly until the early 1990s and has remained relatively stable since then" (p. 87).*Polarization - "The tighter connection between religiosity and political and social conservatism does not yet amount to true polarization between religious and secular people in the United States" (p.106).

Most Americans say they believe in God, and more than a third say they attend religious services every week. Yet studies show that people do not really go to church as often as they claim, and it is not always clear what they mean when they tell pollsters they believe in God or pray. *American Religion* presents the best and most up-to-date information about religious trends in the United States, in a succinct and accessible manner. This sourcebook provides essential information about key developments in American religion since 1972, and is the first major resource of its kind to appear in more than two decades. Mark Chaves looks at trends in diversity, belief, involvement, congregational life, leadership, liberal Protestant decline, and polarization. He draws on two important surveys: the General Social Survey, an ongoing survey of Americans' changing attitudes and behaviors, begun in 1972; and the National Congregations Study, a survey of American religious congregations across the religious spectrum. Chaves finds that American religious life has seen much continuity in recent decades, but also much change. He challenges the popular notion that religion is witnessing a resurgence in the United States--in fact, traditional belief and practice is either stable or declining. Chaves examines why the decline in liberal Protestant denominations has been accompanied by the spread of liberal Protestant attitudes about religious and social tolerance, how confidence in religious institutions has declined more than confidence in secular institutions, and a host of other crucial trends.

Winner of the 2012 Book Award in Christianity and Culture, *Christianity Today* "Chaves has provided new scholars, nonspecialists in the sociology of religion, and the general public with an accessible and accurate text that gathers a wide range of information into one place, and does so in barely more than 100 pages. Chaves's *American Religion* will serve as an important introduction to the topic and a reference for scholars, religious leaders, and the general public for years to come."--Paul J. Olson, *Sociology of Religion*"In this brief book sociologist Chaves traces changes occurring in religion in the U.S. between 1972 and 2008. . . . Chaves demonstrates that the overall picture of religion in the U.S. is one of continuity and stability rather than dramatic change. Nevertheless subtle changes are occurring, and this book does an excellent job of sifting through the data."--Choice"*American Religion*, for such a thin book, packs a punch, providing helpful insights and myth-busting perspectives on almost every page. This really is a book that every pastor should take the time to read. It will be a quick but powerful dose of the state of American religion."--Andrew Root, *Word World*"Chaves' study offers a rich, textured, and well-researched account of American religiosity. The book will serve to advance undergraduate and graduate learning concerning the complex and oftentimes complicated nexus between U.S. religion and politics. It will also interest scholars, policymakers, and the general public who care about how religion currently features in American public life and what future directions it may take."--Catherine E. Wilson, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*"Unsettling though it may be, *American Religion* is essential reading for pastors and lay leaders alike who want to understand the larger social context in which the mainline church both struggles and endures."--Rebekah Peoples Massengill, *Interpretation*"Chaves's book raises more questions than it answers. Maybe that should be expected from a descriptive piece: the variety of data selected and presented naturally begs interpretation. For this reason, I think that Chaves's volume would also make a useful foil with graduate students in social science."--Penny Long Marler, *Social Forces*From the Inside Flap?"An invaluable contribution to clarifying the facts about religious change in America."--Robert Putnam, coauthor of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*"*American Religion* promises to become the book of record for people interested in religious trends in American society. The U.S. Census does not include questions on religion. So while many other aspects of American economy and society get decennial descriptives, religion is left to advocates, activists, and scholars. Chaves fills the gap with numbers, and context enough for the general reader to digest."--Michael Hout, coauthor of *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years*"This book provides key facts so that those who wish to discuss or debate American religion can do so knowledgeably. It covers a rich amount of material, showing the

many ways religion in the United States is remarkably unchanged over the past forty years, and the important ways it has changed. Mark Chaves is one of the very top scholars of American religion."--Michael O. Emerson, coauthor of *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* From the Back Cover "An invaluable contribution to clarifying the facts about religious change in America."--Robert Putnam, coauthor of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* "American Religion promises to become the book of record for people interested in religious trends in American society. The U.S. Census does not include questions on religion. So while many other aspects of American economy and society get decennial descriptives, religion is left to advocates, activists, and scholars. Chaves fills the gap with numbers, and context enough for the general reader to digest."--Michael Hout, coauthor of *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* "This book provides key facts so that those who wish to discuss or debate American religion can do so knowledgeably. It covers a rich amount of material, showing the many ways religion in the United States is remarkably unchanged over the past forty years, and the important ways it has changed. Mark Chaves is one of the very top scholars of American religion."--Michael O. Emerson, coauthor of *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*