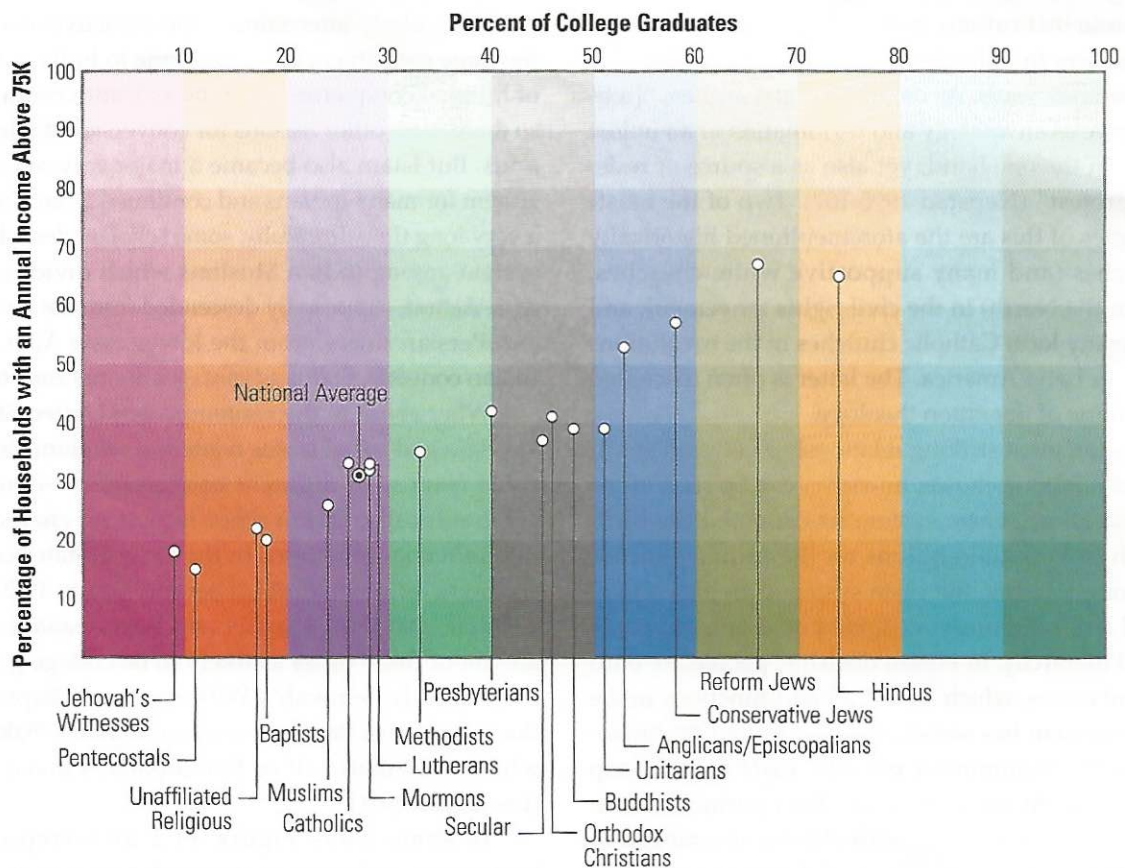


Figure 14.2 Income and Education of Various U.S. Religious Denominations

SOURCE: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006).

Among Christians, most conversions are between denominations within the same religious tradition. Conversions between Catholics and Protestants—or either and Mormons—are considered much more of a leap. For a long time, intermarriage was the dominant reason for people changing denominations (and for Jewish-Christian conversions as well). The strong notion that families should go to church together was important here. So was a simple attempt to make life less complicated or to decide “what to raise the children.” There is some recent evidence that people have become more comfortable retaining their religious commitments within dual-faith or dual-denominational marriages. Perhaps this stems from older ages at marriage or from such marriages just being more common and acceptable.

Most religions seek to recruit, or proselytize, more members—as each should, if it is the true religion and cares for everyone’s spiritual well-being (or for their eternal souls). In the Christian tradition, proselytizing is known as being an **evangelical**, literally someone who believes in salvation through personal conversion (or being “born again”), and evangelicals are known for their emphasis on bringing their beliefs to others. Some religions make proselytizing a strong expectation of membership; Jehovah’s Witnesses often go door to door in their communities distributing literature and seeking converts, while in the Mormon Church, most

members will do an extended period of missionary work, usually in early adulthood, somewhere around the world for a period of 18 months to 2 years. There are, however, a few exceptions. Hindus do not generally proselytize (although there are some aggressive gurus). Jews actually even make it difficult for people to convert, primarily because Judaism is only partly a religion. More powerfully, it is an ethnic group. In Israel, the determinant of whether one is Jewish or not is mostly whether or not one had a Jewish mother. An individual does not have to be a practicing Jew, just have had a Jewish mother him- or herself. The notion that Jews are God’s “chosen people” may be the key idea in Judaism, and it obviously leads to all kinds of exclusionary assumptions about non-Jews who might wish to become members.

In turn, the idea that being Jewish is both an ethnicity and a religion has led sociologists and others to the notion of cultural Judaism, defined as claiming one’s Jewishness but not accepting the doctrines of the religion. Such Jews should probably be called “ethnic Jews” because they are unwilling to give up their identification with the group despite agnostic or atheistic beliefs. Conversions among denominations within Judaism are probably as frequent as they are among Christians. For example, the children of Orthodox Jews born in the United States seem to have less than a 50 percent chance of remaining Orthodox as adults, with 29 percent