

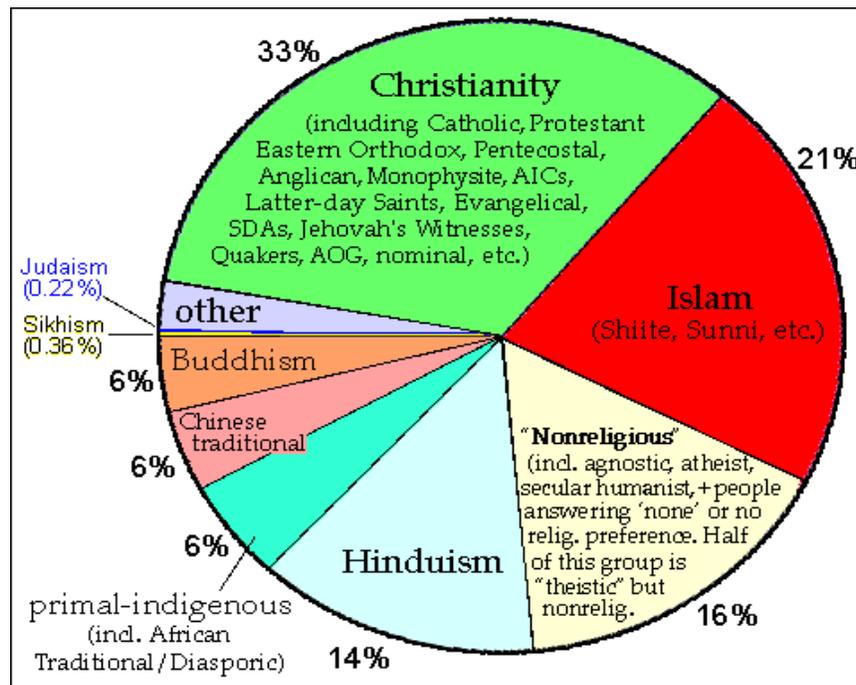


World Religions

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The following pie chart shows you the major religions of the World. Each of the “world religions” is actually a classification of multiple distinct movements, sects, groups, divisions, philosophies, denominations, etc. None of these world religions is a single, unified, monolithic organization. The number of members is just a “rough” estimate. I will list the top 16 religions or groups along with some basic beliefs and facts about each. For the statistics in this column, I will use a World population of 6.65 billion.



Christianity: 2.2 billion (33%) (World-wide)

Including Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Latter-day Saints, etc.

Christianity believes in one God, while the central figure is Jesus (or Christ the son of God) who came into this world by immaculate conception to a virgin named Mary. His birth is celebrated at Christmas. Jesus was hung on a cross by the Romans at age 33. Because of the suffering Jesus endured, salvation can be achieved by anyone who believes in him. The Christian holy text is the Bible (both the Old and New Testament).

Islam: 1.4 billion (21%) (Mid-east, North Africa, and Asia)

83% Sunnites - 16% Shi'ites - 1% Other

Islam is the religion of allegiance to God and his prophet Mohammed. Mohammed lived around 570-632 and came from Mecca. The religion's book of revelation, mediated by the prophet, is the Koran that expands on the Old and New Testaments. Islamic law requires daily prayer, alms giving, abstinence during the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca.

Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 1 billion (16%) (World-wide)

Secular humanism emphasizes reason and scientific inquiry, individual freedom and responsibility, human values and compassion. They reject God and all supernatural and authoritarian beliefs.

Nonreligious includes people who may or may not believe in God but don't belong to any religious group.

Agnosticism is the philosophical view that the existence of God is unknown or cannot be proved, and therefore is irrelevant to life.

Atheism encompasses people who don't believe in God.

Hinduism: 900 million (14%) (India and Nepal)

Hindus recognise one God, Brahman, the eternal origin who is the cause and foundation of all existence. The gods of the Hindu faith represent different expressions of Brahman. Different Hindu communities may have their own divinities whom they worship, but these are simply different ways of approaching the Ultimate. Hindus recognise three principal gods:

Brahma, who creates the universe

Vishnu, who preserves the universe

Shiva (right), who destroys the universe



Chinese traditional religion: 395 million (6%) (China)

Chinese traditional religion is the blend of religious practices most Han Chinese have practiced for thousands of years. It can be regarded as a mixture of ancestor worship, Buddhism, Chinese folk religion, Confucianism, and Taoism.

Buddhism: 380 million (5.8%) (Thailand, Cambodia, China, and Japan)

Buddhism is a religion, a practical philosophy, and a psychology focusing on the teachings of the Gautama Buddha who lived from the mid-6th to the early 5th century BC. A Buddha is generally considered to be a person who discovers the true nature of reality through years of spiritual cultivation, investigation of religious practices, and meditation. Any person who has become “awakened” from the “sleep of ignorance” by realizing the true nature of reality is called a Buddha.



Primal-indigenous (Paganism): 300 million (4.6%) (Africa)

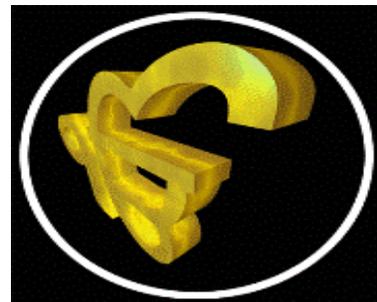
Primal-indigenous is not a single religion, but simply the term that refers to followers of traditional, pre-literate cultures. Other terms used to refer to the religion of these peoples include "traditional", "native", or "tribal." Other words such as "paganism" or "animism" have been applied to these groups in the past.

African Traditional: 100 million (1.5%) (Africa)

Considering Africa as a whole, the main objects of traditional religious belief are: God, the divinities, spirits and the ancestors. Belief in God, conceived as one Supreme Personal Being seems to be shared by the majority of African cultures. Each local community has its name for God, but the people believe that it is the one and same God who is given different names and who is the ultimate source of all the other spiritual beings, the universe and all that it contains.

Sikhism: 23 million (.35%) (India)

Sikhism (founded over 500 years ago) preaches a message of devotion and remembrance of God at all times, truthful living, equality of mankind and denounces superstitions and blind rituals. Sikhism is open to all through the teachings of its 10 Gurus enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book and the Living Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib.



Juche: 19 million (.3%) (North Korea)

The Juche Idea is the official ideology of North Korea and the political system based on it. The core of Juche is that “man is the master of his own destiny”, “independent stand”, or “spirit of self-reliance”.

Spiritism: 15 million (.24%) (South America)

Spiritism is a religious, philosophic, and scientific doctrine that teaches us about our true, eternal lives as spirits created by God, including: our origin and the process of reincarnation by which we will one day reach our spiritual destiny; our relationship and

means of communication with God and the discarnate beings of the Spirit Realm; the moral and physical laws that govern all life in our universe.

Judaism: 15 million (.23%) (Israel and United States)



Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people. It is one of the first recorded faiths and oldest religious traditions still practiced today. Judaism has remained tightly bound to a number of religious principles, the most important of which is the belief that there is a single God, who created the universe and revealed his laws and commandments to them in the form of the Torah.

Baha'i: 7 million (.11%) (India, United States, Iran, Viet Nam)

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God who is the source of all creation. God is transcendent and unknowable. However, He has sent, and will continue to send, great prophets to humanity, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the "*Word of God*." Every person has an immortal soul. Unlike everything else in creation, it is not subject to decomposition. At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world. Baha'u'llah's most famous saying: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens".

Jainism: 4.2 million (.065%) (India)

Jainism is an ancient religion from India that teaches that the way to liberation and bliss is to live lives of harmlessness and renunciation. The essence of Jainism is concern for the welfare of every being in the universe and for the health of the universe itself. Jains believe that animals and plants, as well as human beings, contain living souls. Each of these souls, whatever species it may be in, is considered of equal value and should be treated with respect and compassion.

Shinto: 4 million (.061%) (Japan)



Shinto is a native religion of Japan and was once its state religion. It is a form of animism. Shinto beliefs and ways of thinking are deeply embedded in the subconscious fabric of modern Japanese society. The afterlife is not a primary concern in Shinto, and much more emphasis is placed on fitting into this world, instead of preparing for the next. The Shinto religion has a great love and reverence for nature.

Cao Dai: 3.5 million (.055%) (Vietnam)



Cao Dai is a relatively new religion established in Tay Ninh, Southern Vietnam in 1926. The term Cao Dai literally means “high place” and means that place where God reigns. Caodaiists credit God as the religion’s founder. Adherents engage in ethical practices such as prayer, veneration of ancestors, nonviolence, and vegetarianism with the minimum goal of rejoining God the Father in Heaven and the ultimate goal of freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Have you noticed that every time you talk or write about Religion or Politics, somebody gets offended? For some reason, people think that their opinions on these two subjects are the only correct opinions and anybody who cares to differ is a stupid idiot. But this is a free country and this is my column and you have to admit, I have done the research, so I’m going to give you my views on religion.

What is the purpose of religion? First of all, let’s break it down into the basics – spiritual religion and real religion. Religious doctrines that concern the fear of death and what happens after we die are the spiritual religion. The purpose of these beliefs is to reassure us that we have nothing to fear from death. Doctrines that teach us how to be a better and happier person in this life are the real religion. The purpose of these beliefs is to prepare us for the after life. If we could live forever on Earth, there would be no need for religion.

Churches provide the best way to reinforce one’s beliefs and to share them with others who feel the same way. Most church groups offer help and protection for their members in times of need. Only family ties are stronger than religious ties. The best thing that most churches do is teach and encourage good moral behavior. All religions have their good points and their faults. Most religions teach that they are the only true church and that all the others (there are over 4200 recognized religions) are fundamentally flawed. Many religious leaders try to dictate the “truth” and tell you what to think. I think most all religions are “true” and the best way to judge a church is by the quality of the members it attracts.

Does a person have to go to church in order to get to heaven? I hope not. I think if you are a person of strong moral character and have a little ambition, you can obtain most of the benefits of religion on your own. You don’t necessarily have to go to church in order to learn about life and death, read books, research different religions on the Internet, give yourself some quiet time to think about things, meditate, and pray. For most people, however, church is the best place to accomplish all of these things. If you want to go to Heaven, you better develop good moral character now and there is nothing wrong with trying to create a heaven on Earth in this life. Be a good person, take care of your family, play games, and be happy.

“Happy are the pure in heart for they shall see God”

Jesus

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