



Religion in the United States August 27, 2006

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Have you ever laid in bed (by yourself) staring at the ceiling late at night thinking about the meaning of life? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What's going to happen after I die? Is there a heaven and a hell? Do spirits and angels really exist? Is there a God?

These questions have crossed most people's minds and they have certainly crossed mine. To keep sane and have some sense of order in our life, people need something to believe in. This is where religion comes into play. The dictionary defines religion as a set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of people concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. Religious scholars have stated similar definitions, which include:

- **An organized system of faith and worship.**
- **System of beliefs and practices concerned with sacred things and/or symbols uniting individuals into a single moral community.**
- **A way of seeing, thinking, and acting inspired by questions about what things mean: i.e. Where did we come from? What is our destiny? What is true? What is false? What is my duty or obligation? What is the meaning of suffering? What is the meaning of death? How shall we live?**
- **Supernatural beliefs involved in worship. Tends to apply to a group or culture, religions often provide ceremonial rituals for dealing with major life events (birth, marriage, and death).**
- **Religion may be a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with faith.**

(The following statistics are based on a U.S. population of 300 million)

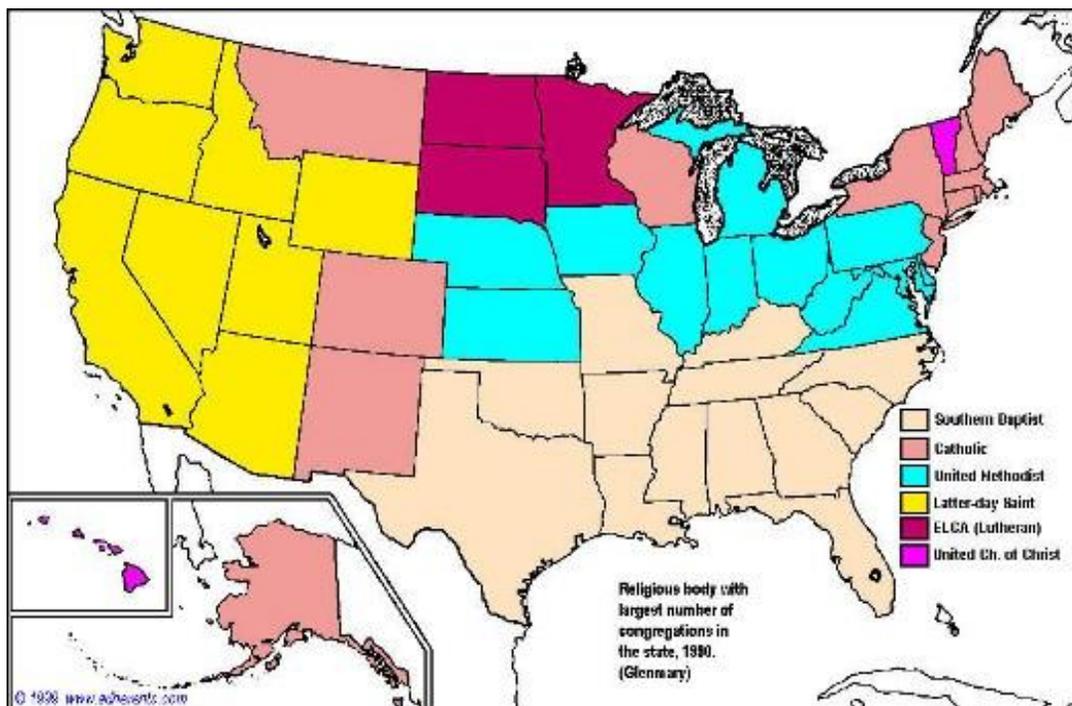
The United States is an overwhelming Christian country. About 230 million (76.5%) people belong to one of the many Christian religions. About 40 million (13.2%) people believe in God but don't belong to an organized religion. About 4 million (1.3%) people belong to Judaism. I estimate that 3 million (1%) people belong to Islam. The estimated

number of Muslims in the U.S. varies greatly. Islamic leaders estimate that there are 8 million Muslims in the U.S. Census and voting records show about 1.5 million. There are also about 3 million (1%) Atheists and Agnostics in the U.S. Atheists are the people who don't believe in God and Agnostics are people who believe it is impossible to know whether there is a God. There are 1.5 million (.5%) people who belong to Buddhism and 1.2 million (.4%) people who belong to Hinduism. This leaves about 18 million (6.1%) people to belong to one of the 2400 other religions in the World.

In this column, we are going to examine the largest Christian religions in the United States.

Denomination	2006 Est. Population	Est. % of U.S. Pop.
Catholic	74 Million	24.5%
Baptist	49 Million	16.3%
Methodist	20.5 Million	6.8%
Lutheran	14 Million	4.6%
Presbyterian	8 Million	2.7%
Pentecostal	7 Million	2.4%
Episcopalian	5 Million	1.7%
Latter-day Saints	5 Million	1.6%
Churches of Christ	3.5 Million	1.2%
United Church of Christ	2 Million	0.7%
Jehovah's Witnesses	2 Million	0.6%
Assemblies of God	1.5 Million	0.5%

This map shows the states with the most congregations of the different religious groups.





The Roman Catholic Church is the Christian Church in full communion with the Pope, who is currently Pope Benedict XVI. It traces its origins to the original undivided Christian community founded by Jesus, with its traditions first established by the Twelve Apostles and maintained through unbroken Apostolic succession. It is the largest organized body of any World religion with over 1.1 billion members. Catholics place particular importance on the seven sacraments for obtaining salvation.



Baptist churches believe in adult baptism through full immersion, evangelism, pietism, and sectarianism. Baptist traditions adhere to the "Four Freedoms" articulated by Baptist historian Walter B. Shurden. Soul freedom: the soul is competent before God. Church freedom: freedom of the local church from outside interference. Bible freedom: the individual is free to interpret the Bible for himself or herself. Religious freedom: the individual is free to choose whether to practice their religion, another religion, or no religion.



The Methodist Church originated in 18th century Britain, and thanks to vigorous missionary activity spread throughout the British Empire, the United States, and beyond. Methodism follows the traditional and near-universal Christian belief in the triune God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Originally, Methodism appealed especially to workers, poor families, slaves and emphasized that all people can be saved.



Lutheranism is a movement within Christianity that began with the theological insights of Martin Luther in the 16th century. Lutherans believe the bible is divinely inspired and is the final authority for all matters of faith and doctrine. They hold that the Holy Scripture is explained by the Book of Concord. Lutherans believe in the Holy Communion with bread and wine.



Presbyterianism is a form of Protestant Christianity that place high emphasis on the sovereignty of God in all things and the necessity of personal conversion by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Presbyterians distinguish themselves by both doctrine and institutional organization that they prefer to call “church order”.



Pentecostalism is a form of Evangelical Christianity that places special emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as shown in the Biblical account of the Day of Pentecost. Pentecostals believe that one must be saved by believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior for the forgiveness of sins and to be made acceptable to God. They believe in water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit.



Episcopal churches are Protestant churches that use bishops regarded as being in Apostolic succession (an Episcopalian church governance). They maintain the validity of God's grace imparted through the seven traditional sacraments of the Church (i.e., Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession & Reconciliation, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Healing/Unction).



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) believe that God is our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ is the Son of God (our Savior), and the Holy Ghost or Spirit helps us recognize truth. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, people can return to live with God if we keep his commandments. Members believe in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. They also believe that life has a sacred purpose and families can be together forever.



The Churches of Christ are Christians, undenominational, and have no central headquarters or president. The head of the church is none other than Jesus Christ himself. Each congregation of the churches of Christ is autonomous, and it is the Word of God that unites them into One Faith. They follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and his holy Apostles, and not the teachings of man.



The United Church of Christ embraces a theological heritage that affirms the Bible as the authoritative witness to the Word of God, the creeds of the ecumenical councils, and the confessions of the Reformation. Christ alone is Head of the church. Members seek a balance between freedom of conscience and accountability to the apostolic faith.



Jehovah's Witnesses are members of an international religion who believe they are the restoration of first century Christianity. From their inception, they have been concerned with the second advent of Jesus. They refuse to become involved in conflicts and are well known for their rejection of blood transfusions. They believe the Bible to be the true word of God.



Assemblies of God believe that the scriptures are inspired by God and declare his plan for mankind. That there is only one true God – revealed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They believe in baptism by immersion and Holy Communion. The church has a mission to seek and save all who are lost in sin.

Since there are over 2400 different religious groups in the World, which one is the “true” church? Okay, okay, I know – the one you belong to is the chosen one. In my humble opinion, all of the religions that preach love, family values, peace, and helping other human beings are all “true” religions. The one percent or so religious groups that preach hate, love of death, and the killing of innocent people are “false” religions and its followers will not be going to heaven or paradise anytime soon.

What is the meaning of life? I’m not real sure but I think God put us here on Earth for a reason. We must choose between good and evil and whether or not we want to be a good person. That’s why we need something to believe in and something to look forward to even after death. Where did I come from? I can’t even remember my early childhood - how could I possibly remember existing before I was born? However, I do think it is possible my spirit existed. Yes, I do believe in angels, spirits, and even ghosts. God does exist.