

Religions Around the World

It's important to respect people's points of view, especially where religion is concerned, because it's a subject that many people feel very strongly about. Over the centuries, people with different religious beliefs have gone to war and ostracized neighbors who didn't agree with their views. The five most influential religions are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. A "cult" is an extreme religion with a small number of followers. In 2020, there were about 2.3 billion Christians, 2 billion Muslims, 1.2 billion Hindus, 320 million Buddhists and 15 million Jews in the world. "Atheists" are people who believe that gods don't exist. "Agnostics" are people who think that God's existence cannot be proven, so they remain undecided.

Christianity

Christianity (which began as a Jewish sect in the first century AD) is based on the life and teachings of Jesus. Many Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God and that he was born to the Virgin Mary, who was impregnated by the Holy Spirit. They also believe that Jesus gave his life to save humanity and that by repenting our sins, we can go to Heaven. If we don't, we will be sent to hell for eternity (on "Judgement Day"). Jesus' followers believe that he suffered for people's sins, died on a cross, then was resurrected from the dead. Christians call the stories of Jesus the "Gospels". It seems that he was a good man who did good deeds. Some people say that he performed miracles. People started to write stories about him approximately one hundred years after he was born. These stories are kept in a book called "the bible".



Islam

People who believe in the religion of Islam are called "Muslims". Their core beliefs are that there is only one God, Allah, (a monotheistic religion) and that Muhammad is their prophet who conveyed all Allah's teachings, as told to him by the archangel Gabriel on many occasions between 610 BC and 632 BC. Muhammad was reputedly illiterate. His followers wrote what he told them. Those teachings are written in the Muslim scripture called the "Qur'an" (or "Koran"). Muslims also believe in other prophets including Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. They also believe in a "Judgment Day". Similar to other religions, Muslims have divided into different sects. The majority of Muslims are "Sunni". The largest minority group of Muslims is the "Shia". Sunni and Shia Muslims have fought each other frequently, but since Israel was established in 1948, they have found common enemies – Jews and Christians. Muslims believe that Christians are corrupt because they aren't sufficiently religious! Many say that non-believers of Islam are "infidels". Most Muslims live in the Middle East, Central Asia, Indonesia and sub-Saharan Africa. Their majority are peaceful and law-abiding, but many of them have called for the destruction of Israel, the United States of America and Europe. It is considered a sin to make an image of Muhammad, and is punishable by death.



Hinduism

Hinduism is an old religion with most believers living in India. They don't have a scripture, but many traditions have been handed down over four thousand years. No single person is credited with developing this faith. Hindus worship many different gods (a polytheistic religion) and Hinduism is about the search for liberation that can be achieved through meditation, yoga and prayer. Hindus believe that life has four stages: *student, householder, retiree and renunciant (renounce the pleasures of the flesh and renounce corruption)*.



Fame, fortune and pleasure are all acceptable, but, near the end of your life, you must renounce all, which will put you on the path to spiritual liberation. Hindus believe in the sanctity of all life, and many are vegetarians. The cow is regarded as a sacred animal and cannot be enslaved nor killed. They also believe in reincarnation and "karma". Karma means "reap what you sow". If you say or do something unkind, eventually someone else will be unkind to you. They are tolerant of other religions. In 1947, the British divided India to separate the Hindus and the Muslims. The Hindus stayed in India and the Muslims were given their own state, called Pakistan. Over 14 million people were displaced, and nearly 2 million people died in violent confrontations. Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a Hindu who believed that Gandhi was sympathetic to Muslims. Gandhi once said "*I like your Christ, but I don't like Christians. They are so unlike your Christ.*"

Buddhism

Buddhism is a spin-off of Hinduism. Around 500 BC, a man called Siddhartha Gautama renounced his wealthy lifestyle in India and abandoned his wife and baby. He set off in search of spiritual liberation, known as "*Nirvana*". He searched for the meaning of life for many years. One day, he sat under a bodhi tree and decided not to move until he became "enlightened". After 49 days of meditation, he opened his eyes, and realized that the problem with humanity is that we are all deluded and egoistic, and that we must all renounce "desire", "anger" and "ignorance". Siddhartha, known as "Buddha" ("the



Awakened One"), spent the next forty-five years teaching his wisdom to monks and nuns, promoting a solitary and spiritual way of life. He insisted that his disciples must not write anything, so all his teachings were conveyed orally. Hundreds of years after his death, the Buddha's teachings were finally committed to paper (*the "Pali Canon" (which means "the word of Buddha"), "Mahayana Sutras" and the "Tibetan Book of the Dead" are three major non-canonical Buddhist texts. The Pali Canon includes some of the Buddha's words, and also incorporates the teachings of some of his pupils*). The main messages of Buddhism are love and peace. Buddhists say that their religion isn't a religion, it is a way of life. It is however, considered a religion by many people, because there are temples, prayers and deities. Its philosophy is "seek the truth". It also teaches kindness. Buddha recommended kindness because it helps you on the path to "enlightenment". Buddhists believe in reincarnation and karma. They think that we are reincarnated repeatedly until we learn from our mistakes.

Judaism

Judaism is the religion, philosophy and way of life of Jewish people. It has existed for more than five thousand years and is the oldest monotheistic religion. Jews believe that God revealed his commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai and that they are recorded in the Hebrew bible, called the “Tanakh”. They do not follow the teachings of Jesus and do not consider him to be their saviour. Similar to Christianity and Islam, some Jews follow their religious commandments more rigorously than others. The majority of Jews live in Israel, America and Canada. Jews have often been victims of hatred, prejudice and intolerance. The battle for a piece of land, called Israel, is a major cause of many deaths. Israel was taken away from Palestine and set up as a permanent home for Jews in 1948 after six million of them were killed in concentration camps by Germany during World War Two. A group of nations, led by Great Britain after World War Two, thought that they were doing a good thing – giving Jews their own state. But the creation of Israel has created hatred and resentment among the Palestinians who have since fought over many decades to get their land back. They have the support of other Muslim countries in the region, and many of them say *“we won’t rest until Israel is given back to the Palestinians and every Jewish man, woman and child is dead”*. The only possible solution would be if Hamas, the democratically elected party that currently governs Palestine, recognized Israel’s right to exist. In 2017, the president of the USA (Donald Trump) officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which angered many Palestinians, who claim that the city is the capital of Palestine. Christians have been fighting Jews for nearly two thousand years, and Muslims have been fighting Christians and Jews for more than one thousand years.



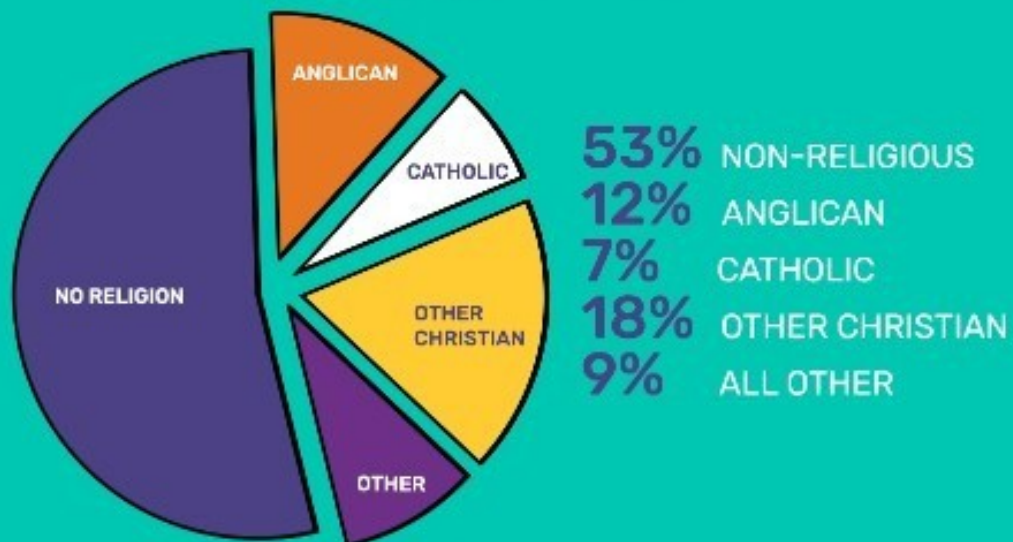
Believe or not believe?

Some religious people say that we need religion to keep us moral. Others however, say that we don’t have to worship anything in order to live a good and moral life. Some people think that a god created this amazing world. Others believe it was science and evolution. It has been said that religion was “invented” to make the process of dying less frightening. Is religion then, just an invention of man? Or is there really a god or gods looking over us? Believers can’t prove that a god exists, and disbelievers can’t prove that one doesn’t. The majority of religious people are good, honourable and law-abiding citizens. They respect other religions and beliefs and want to live together in harmony. But there are some fundamentalists who believe that their religion is the only one true religion and persecute those people who don’t believe in the same god. The vast majority of people follow the religion of their parents and rarely take the time to try to understand alternative philosophies or find out what other religions represent. In other words, we are born into a specific religion, and that alone does not make it “right”.

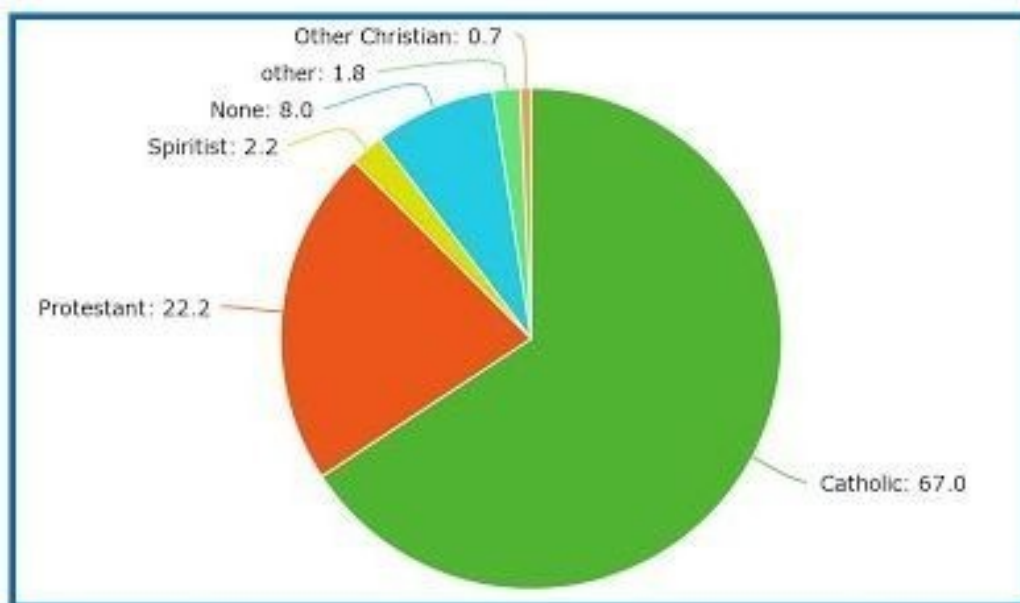
Conclusions

It is almost certain that Jesus, Muhammad and Buddha were real human beings. They were intelligent, spiritually advanced and moral people. Over the centuries however, their teachings have been misinterpreted, exaggerated and exploited by many people for different reasons. The part of the world where you were born, what your parents believed and what education you received, probably determined which religion you follow today. Most religions are based on love and kindness, but religion is also the cause of much violence and many wars. Religion is the source of many rituals, festivities and occasions which bring stability, harmony, happiness and solidarity to many people around the world.

UK - Religions 2021



Brazil - Religions



Definitions:

atheism
monotheism
polytheism
agnosticism
ignosticism

the disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a god
the worship of, or belief in, a single god
the worship of, or belief in, more than one god
the belief that the existence of a deity (or deities) cannot be known with certainty
the idea that the question of the existence of a god is meaningless, because the word "god" has no unambiguous definition