

## Aren't All Religions the Same? - Religions vs Denominations vs Sects vs Cults

### Basic information on various religions:

| Religion                             | Date Founded                                      | Sacred Texts                                                             | Membership <sup>4</sup>       | % of World <sup>5</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <a href="#">Christianity</a>         | 30 <a href="#">CE</a>                             | The Bible                                                                | 2,039 million                 | 32% (dropping)          |
| <a href="#">Islam</a>                | 622 CE                                            | Qur'an & Hadith                                                          | <a href="#">1,570 million</a> | 22% (growing)           |
| <a href="#">Hinduism</a>             | 1500 <a href="#">BCE</a> with truly ancient roots | Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads, & Rig Veda                                    | <a href="#">950 million</a>   | 13% (stable)            |
| No religion (Note 1)                 | -                                                 | None                                                                     | 775 million                   | 12% (dropping)          |
| Chinese folk religion                | 270 BCE                                           | None                                                                     | 390 million                   | 6%                      |
| <a href="#">Buddhism</a>             | 523 BCE                                           | The Tripitaka (consisting of the Vinaya, the Sutras, and the Abhidharma) | 350 - 1,600 million (2)       | 6% (stable?)            |
| Tribal Religions, Shamanism, Animism | Prehistory                                        | Oral tradition                                                           | 232 million                   | 4%                      |
| <a href="#">Atheists</a>             | No date                                           | None                                                                     | 150 million                   | 2%                      |
| New religions.                       | Various                                           | Various                                                                  | 103 million                   | 2%                      |
| <a href="#">Sikhism</a>              | 1500 CE                                           | Guru Granth Sahib                                                        | 23.8 million                  | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Judaism</a>              | Note 3                                            | Torah, Tanach, & Talmud                                                  | 14.5 million                  | <1%                     |
| Spiritism                            |                                                   |                                                                          | 12.6 million                  | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Baha'i Faith</a>         | 1863 CE                                           | Alkitab Alaqdas                                                          | 7.4 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Confucianism</a>         | 520 BCE                                           | Lun Yu                                                                   | 6.3 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Jainism</a>              | 570 BCE                                           | Siddhanta, Pakrit                                                        | 4.3 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Zoroastrianism</a>       | 600 to 6000 BCE                                   | Avesta                                                                   | 2.7 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Shinto</a>               | 500 CE                                            | Kojiki, Nohon Shoki                                                      | 2.7 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Taoism</a> Note 4        | 550 BCE                                           | Tao-te-Ching                                                             | 2.7 million                   | <1%                     |
| Other                                | Various                                           | Various                                                                  | 1.1 million                   | <1%                     |
| <a href="#">Wicca</a> Note 5         | 800 BCE, 1940 CE                                  | None                                                                     | 0.5 million?                  | <1%                     |

**Notes:** - <http://www.religioustolerance.org/worldrel.htm>

- **Note 1:** Persons with no formal, organized religion include [Agnostics](#), [Atheists](#), [Deists](#), freethinkers, [humanists](#), secularists, etc. Their numbers are growing in Europe, North America, and other places. With the collapse of Communism in the USSR, the total numbers worldwide dropped precipitously and are now increasing.
- **Note 2:** There is no consensus on the number of Buddhists in the worlds. [More info](#).
- **Note 3:** There is no consensus on the data of founding of Judaism. Some claim that Adam and Eve were the first Jews, and lived circa 4000 BCE; others suggest that they, and all biblical persons prior to King David are mythical; they never existed. Some would place the date at the time of Abraham, circa 1900 BCE. Some date it to the Exodus from Egypt circa 1490 BCE. Others say that no Exodus happened. On the basis of archeological evidence, many believe that the ancient Hebrews were originally a group of Canaanites who gradually separated from the main body and eventually developed a separate culture. That would certainly explain why so many Jewish holy days were derived from the Pagan Canaanite culture.
- **Note 4:** Many, perhaps most, followers of Chinese folk religion follow a number of different religions/philosophies including Taoism. The number cited for Taoism is an estimate of the number of individuals who follow **only** Taoism.
- **Note 5:** We have included [Wicca](#) even though their numbers are small because such a large percentage of our site's visitors are of that faith. There is [no reliable measure of their numbers](#). Some Wiccans believe that their faith can be traced back to the origins of the Celtic people; other suggest it is a [recently created religion](#) and is based on ancient symbols, deities, seasonal celebration and other factors.

## **Christian Denominations:**

### 35 Largest Christian Denominations in the United States

<http://undergod.procon.org/view.background-resource.php?resourceID=87>

The following 35 Christian denominations and their membership statistics were taken from the 2001 "American Religious Identification Survey" conducted by The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

In the 2001 survey, 50,281 American residential households were asked "What is your religion, if any?" without a suggested list of potential answers or prompts. People who identified themselves as "Christian" or "Protestant" in response to the question were then asked to further specify their particular denomination though some chose not to do so. This list of 35 denominations is a reflection of the range of those responses.

| Name of Religion                     | Description of Religion                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Membership Size |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Catholic                             | <p>"The Roman Catholic Church (commonly known as the Catholic Church) is the Christian Church which is led by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, currently His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.</p> <p>The Roman Catholic Church teaches that it is the 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church founded by Jesus Christ.' Section 8 of the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Church, Lumen Gentium [1] states that 'the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic' subsists 'in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him' (the term successor of Peter refers in Roman Catholic understanding to the Bishop of Rome, the Pope)."</p> <p>(Wikipedia.org, "Roman Catholic Church")</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 50,873,000      |
| Baptist                              | <p>"The Baptists comprise one of the largest and most diverse groupings of Christians in the United States... Baptists have insisted on freedom of thought and expression in pulpit and pew. They have insisted, too, on the absolute autonomy of the local congregation... Baptists are bound together by an amazingly strong 'rope of sand' in allegiance to certain principles and doctrines based generally on the competency of each individual in matters of faith.</p> <p>While they differ in certain minor details, Baptists generally agree on the following principles of faith: the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible as the sole rule of life; the lordship of Jesus Christ; the inherent freedom of persons to approach God for themselves; the granting of salvation through faith by the way of grace and contact with the Holy Spirit...the church as a group of regenerated believers who are baptized upon confession of faith; infant baptism as unscriptural and not to be practiced...the need of redemption from sin; and the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom."</p> <p>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition)</p> | 33,830,000      |
| Christian - no denomination supplied | <p>"One who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ."</p> <p>(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 14,190,000      |
| Methodist / Wesleyan                 | <p>"As United Methodists, we have an obligation to bear a faithful Christian witness to Jesus Christ, the living reality at the center of the Church's life and witness. To fulfill this obligation, we reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, striving to express faithfully the witness we make in our own time.</p> <p>Two considerations are central to this endeavor: the sources from which we derive our theological affirmations and the criteria by which we assess the adequacy of our</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 14,150,000      |

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|                         | <p>understanding and witness.</p> <p>Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."<br/>(Website of the United Methodist Church, <a href="http://www.umc.org">www.umc.org</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |           |
| Lutheran                | <p>"Lutheranism retains much of the tradition of the ancient and medieval church, including a sense of participation in the historic people of God and in the traditional liturgy, revised to accord with Protestant bilblecism. Lutherans are devoted to sound doctrine systematically developed and expressed in thoughtful preaching...</p> <p>Faith, for Lutherans, is not subscription to the dictates of the church, but 'the heart's utter trust' in Christ. 'The just shall live by faith' was the beginning and the end of Luther's thought...</p> <p>All the churches represent a single type of Protestant Christianity built on Luther's principle of justification by faith alone. Lutherans maintain that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and the rule and standard of faith and practice."<br/>(<i>Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition</i>)</p> | 9,580,000 |
| Presbyterian            | <p>"Presbyterians trace their history to the 16th century and the Protestant Reformation. Our heritage, and much of what we believe, began with the French lawyer John Calvin (1509-1564), whose writings crystallized much of the Reformed thinking that came before him...</p> <p>Presbyterians are distinctive in two major ways: they adhere to a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed theology and a form of government that stresses the active, representational leadership of both ministers and church members.</p> <p>Some of the principles articulated by John Calvin remain at the core of Presbyterian beliefs. Among these are the sovereignty of God, the authority of the scripture, justification by grace through faith and the priesthood of all believers."<br/>(Website of the Presbyterian Church USA, <a href="http://www.pcusa.org">www.pcusa.org</a>)</p> | 5,596,000 |
| Protestant              | <p>"Protestantism is one of three primary branches of Christianity. The term 'Protestant' represents a diverse range of theological and social perspectives, denominations, individuals, and related organizations. While no particular belief or practice can be said to define this branch of Christianity, those denominations considered to be well within the realm of Protestantism all have firm roots in the Protestant Reformation in Europe during the sixteenth century."<br/>(Wikipedia.org, "Protestantism")</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 4,647,000 |
| Pentecostal/Charismatic | <p>"Pentecostalism is a modern American Christian movement that emerged out of the Holiness movement around the turn of the twentieth century.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 4,407,000 |

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|                            | <p>There are a great variety of Pentecostal churches, most of which are theologically and socially conservative. In general, Pentecostals are in the evangelical tradition and teach that the Holy Spirit continues to act as it did at the first Pentecost. Teaching that contemporary Christians can receive the same spiritual gifts that the apostles did, many Pentecostal churches use the word apostolic in their names.</p> <p>Seeking and receiving the gift of tongues is regarded as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in many Pentecostal churches this is a requirement for full discipleship. Other spiritual gifts, such as healing, love, joy, prophecy, and answers to prayer, also make up Pentecostals' experience of God. Pentecostals are generally less bound to traditional forms of worship than are other churches, and many have adapted contemporary music for evangelistic purposes."</p> <p><i>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States)</i></p> |           |
| Episcopalian/Anglican      | <p>"The Episcopal Church and its offshoots trace their origins to the Church of England (the Anglican Church), which severed allegiance to the papacy during the Protestant Reformation...</p> <p>Two sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, are recognized by Episcopal churches as 'certain sure witnesses and effectual agencies of God's love and grace.' Baptism by any church in the name of the Trinity is recognized as valid. Without defining the holy mystery, the Episcopal Church believes in the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist. The church also recognizes a sacramental character in confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick."</p> <p><i>(Handbook of American Denominations, 12th Edition)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 3,451,000 |
| Mormon / Latter-Day Saints | <p>"Some of the basic beliefs of the Church are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God is our Heavenly Father. He loves us and wants us to return to Him. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is our Savior. He redeems us from death by providing the Resurrection. He saves us from sin as we repent.</li> <li>○ Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can return to live with God if we keep His commandments.</li> <li>○ The Holy Ghost helps us to recognize truth.</li> <li>○ The first principles and ordinances of the gospel are faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost.</li> <li>○ The Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth.</li> <li>○ The priesthood authority of God exists in His Church today, just as it did in the original</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                        | 2,787,000 |

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|                                        | <p>Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Bible and the Book of Mormon are the word of God.</li> <li>○ God reveals His will to prophets today, just as He did anciently.</li> <li>○ Our life has a sacred purpose.</li> <li>○ Families can be together forever.</li> <li>○ Through serving others, we can experience joy and draw closer to God."</li> </ul> <p>(Official information about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <a href="http://www.mormon.org">www.mormon.org</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |           |
| Churches of Christ                     | <p>"We are undenominational and have no central headquarters or president. The head of the church is none other than Jesus Christ himself (Ephesians 1:22-23).</p> <p>Each congregation of the churches of Christ is autonomous, and it is the Word of God that unites us into One Faith (Ephesians 4:3-6). We follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and his holy Apostles, and not the teachings of man. We are Christians only!"</p> <p>(Churches of Christ Website, <a href="http://www.church-of-christ.org">www.church-of-christ.org</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 2,503,000 |
| Nondenominational                      | Those churches not associated with a particular denomination.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 2,489,000 |
| Congregational/United Church of Christ | <p>"The United Church of Christ came into being in 1957 with the union of two Protestant denominations: the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Each of these was, in turn, the result of a union of two earlier traditions.</p> <p>...The characteristics of the United Church of Christ can be summarized in part by the key words in the names that formed our union: Christian, Reformed, Congregational, Evangelical.</p> <p>...We affirm that the authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and interpreted with the aid of the Holy Spirit stands above and judges all human culture, institutions and laws. But we recognize our calling both as individuals and as the church to live in the world:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To proclaim in word and action the Gospel of Jesus Christ.</li> <li>• To work for reconciliation and the unity of the broken Body of Christ.</li> <li>• To seek justice and liberation for all."</li> </ul> <p>(Website of the United Church of Christ, <a href="http://www.ucc.org">www.ucc.org</a>)</p> | 1,378,000 |
| Jehovah's Witness                      | "Jehovah's Witnesses are members of a worldwide Christian religion who actively share with others information about God, whose name is Jehovah, and about his Son, Jesus Christ.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 1,331,000 |

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|                   | <p>They base their beliefs solely on the principles found in the Holy Bible and view first-century Christianity as their model.</p> <p>They believe that in addition to drawing one closer to God, living by Bible principles gives purpose to life, promotes strong family ties, and develops productive and honest citizens."</p> <p>(Jehovah's Witness Public Information Site, <a href="http://www.jw-media.org">www.jw-media.org</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |
| Assemblies of God | <p>"The Assemblies of God is the world's largest Pentecostal Protestant Christian denomination... The Assemblies of God holds to a conservative Protestant theology expressed in the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, which emphasizes such core Pentecostal doctrines as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and faith healing. Congregations are independent and autonomous from each other and the national headquarters; however only the national headquarters has authority to ordain ministers and revoke their credentials."</p> <p>(Official Website of the Assemblies of God, <a href="http://www.ag.org">www.ag.org</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 1,106,000 |
| Evangelical       | <p>"The word evangelicalism usually refers to a tendency in diverse branches of conservative Christianity Protestantism, typified by an emphasis on evangelism, a personal experience of conversion, biblically-oriented faith, and a belief in the relevance of Christian faith to cultural issues. In the late 20th century and early 21st century, Protestant people, churches and social movements were often called evangelical in contrast to Protestant liberalism.</p> <p>Evangelicals today are at least as varied as ever. Some work entirely within their own denominations, others pay less heed to denominational differences and may be members of less formal and locally based, independent churches. Their focus may be on assisting their own members first and foremost, their inspiration being this emphasis of Paul in his New Testament letters. However, there remains the long-standing evangelical tradition of taking to needy areas practical assistance (e.g. medical, educational) along with the gospel, though eschewing attempts, at home or abroad, to influence society by means other than the gospel.</p> <p>Others, particularly in the USA, are engaged in attempts at social improvement through political means."</p> <p>(Wikipedia.org, "Evangelicalism")</p> | 1,032,000 |
| Church of God     | <p>"The church's major doctrines blend many Protestant themes with those that are specifically Pentecostal: justification by faith, sanctification, baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, the need to be born again, fruitfulness in Christian living, and a strong interest in the pre-millennial Second Coming of Christ... The Church of God professes reliance on the Bible 'as a whole rightly divided rather than upon any</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 944,000   |

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|                       | <p>written creed.' It practices divine healing; condemns the use of alcohol and tobacco; opposes membership in secret societies; and accepts baptism, the Lord's Supper, and foot washing as ordinances."</p> <p><i>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |         |
| Seventh-Day Adventist | <p>"As a Christian church, Seventh-day Adventists are a faith community rooted in the beliefs described by the Holy Scriptures. Adventists describe these beliefs in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God's greatest desire is for you to see a clear picture of His character. When you see Him clearly, you will find His love irresistible.</li> <li>• Scripture is a road map. The Bible is God's voice, speaking His love personally to you today.</li> <li>• Jesus is the one who never changes in a universe that always does. Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Friend, God's Son, and God Himself!</li> <li>• God's vision for you is life as He lives it! God loves you, and wants to give you the highest quality of life imaginable.</li> <li>• In the heart of God is a place you can experience as home. God loves you, and wants to spend time with you personally, one on one, as two close friends."</li> </ul> <p><i>(Seventh-Day Adventist Church Website, www.adventist.org)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 724,000 |
| Orthodox (Eastern)    | <p>"Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches (also known as the Eastern churches) do not have a single hierarchical institution. Instead, there are dozens of national bodies, each of which worships in its native language with its own independent (autocephalous) hierarchy. Each Orthodox church thus reflects its own national heritage and ethnic customs in its liturgy. Unlike the Protestant churches, which also demonstrate a wide variety of institutions and forms, most of the Orthodox churches are in communion with one another and hold to the same basic theology based on the ancient creeds of Christianity.</p> <p>... The liturgy is an ancient drama that celebrates Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Lighting, clerical vestments and altar adornments, icons, music, and consecrated bread and wine bring the kingdom of God into the present. The word <i>orthodox</i> means 'true glory' as well as 'straight teaching.' 'Giving glory to God is the purpose of life' is the keynote of this tradition. Praising God, giving God thanks, and receiving God's presence in the sanctified gifts capture the heart of worship."</p> <p><i>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition)</i></p> | 645,000 |
| Holiness/Holy         | <p>"The Holiness movement grew out of the Methodist Church beginning in the mid-nineteenth century... Holiness teaching generally rejects various forms of popular entertainment, such</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 569,000 |

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|                        | <p>as dancing, movies, popular music, makeup, ornate clothing, gambling, drinking, and smoking. In many ways, the Holiness movement represents a countercultural movement in the U.S., but its adherents continue to live and work in the midst of the wider society.</p> <p>Many Holiness churches use the word Apostolic in their names to emphasize their aim of returning to the life of the New Testament church, when the Holy Spirit was perceived to be particularly active. After 1900 many in the Holiness movement embraced further works of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and physical healing... Since the Holiness movement is focused more on lifestyle and an experience of conversion followed by sanctification, it is to be distinguished from the more doctrinally oriented fundamentalist movement."</p> <p><i>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                              |         |
| Church of the Nazarene | <p>"The Church of the Nazarene is a Protestant Christian church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, tracing its roots to an anniversary date of 1908. It was founded to spread the message of scriptural holiness (Christlike living) across the lands. Today the Church of the Nazarene is located in 151 world areas.</p> <p>The Church of the Nazarene is a Great Commission church. We believe that God offers to everyone forgiveness, peace, joy, purpose, love, meaning in life, and the promise of heaven when life is over by entering and experiencing a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are called to take this message to people everywhere.</p> <p>The Church of the Nazarene is also a holiness church. We believe that Christians can experience a deeper level of life in which there is victory over sin, power to witness and serve, and a richer fellowship with God, all through the infilling of the Holy Spirit."</p> <p><i>(Official Site of the International Church of the Nazarene, <a href="http://www.nazarene.org">www.nazarene.org</a>)</i></p> | 544,000 |
| Disciples of Christ    | <p>"The Mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): to be and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.</p> <p>Beliefs and practices usually associated with Disciples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Communion</li> <li>• Freedom of belief</li> <li>• Baptism by immersion</li> <li>• Belief in the oneness of the church</li> <li>• The ministry of believers"</li> </ul> <p><i>(Website of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), <a href="http://www.disciples.org">www.disciples.org</a>)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 492,000 |

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| Church of the Brethren | <p>"In the New Testament, the word 'brethren' describes a community of men and women who chose another way of living: the way of Jesus. The Church of the Brethren, begun nearly three centuries ago in Germany, still draws people who want to continue Jesus' work of faithfulness and loving service...</p> <p>The central emphasis of the Church of the Brethren is not a creed, but a commitment to follow Christ in simple obedience, to be faithful disciples in the modern world. As do most other Christians, the Brethren believe in God as Creator and loving Sustainer. We confess the Lordship of Christ, and we seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life, thought, and mission...</p> <p>For guidance, Brethren look to the scriptures rather than to doctrine. Our faith emphasizes compassion, peacemaking, and simplicity. We baptize those who seek to follow Jesus; we anoint for healing; and in our love feast we re-enact the Last Supper, at which Jesus washed his disciples' feet and offered the bread and cup of communion."<br/>(The Official Homepage of the Church of the Brethren, <a href="http://www.brethren.org">www.brethren.org</a>)</p> | 358,000 |
| Mennonite              | <p>"Dating from the 1520s in Central Europe, these Protestants take their name from Menno Simons, an early Dutch leader of the 'Radical Reformation.' These reformers rejected the 'magisterial Reformation' of Martin Luther and John Calvin whom they believed compromised Jesus' teachings... They were treated as outsiders, heretics, and even outlaws by Catholics and Protestants alike. Their primary concerns were not with proper theology, the sacraments, or liturgy. Rather, they believed themselves called to exemplify godly living based on the Sermon on the Mount. Until recently, most of those quietly dedicated Christians frowned on involvement in secular activity, refusing to take oaths, bear arms, vote, or hold public office. They are a called-out (from the state, from conventional society) fellowship of believers. Always emphasizing the local congregation, some groups insist on living in 'intentional communities.'"<br/>(<i>Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition</i>)</p>                                                                                                                                                      | 346,000 |
| Reformed/Dutch Reform  | <p>"Above all, our faith is centered in Christ. Every need of ours finds its answer in Jesus Christ...</p> <p>The final authority in the Reformed faith is Holy Scripture, the living Word of God, spoken to everyone through the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and makes it real and actual in our lives. This has always been and will always be the authentic wellspring of Reformed faith...</p> <p>From time to time the Reformed Church in America encourages its congregations and assemblies to study confessional statements written by ecumenical partner churches throughout the world."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 289,000 |

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|                         | (Website of the Reformed Church in America, <a href="http://www.rca.org">www.rca.org</a> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |         |
| Apostolic/New Apostolic | <p>"The New Apostolic Church of North America is a variant of the Catholic Apostolic Church movement in England... It is difficult to place this body into a category because it emerged from the evangelical movement in the Anglican Church, adopted some Pentecostal practices, and over the years moved closer to Roman Catholic practice and piety.</p> <p>The founders of the church believed in the imminent return of Christ. In preparation for the expected exchaton, they attempted to recreate the apostolic offices of teh church. Thus there were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and so on...</p> <p>This church teaches that only the Apostles have received from Christ the commission and power to forgive sin. All clergy and other 'office-bearers' are selected by the apostleship."<br/> <i>(Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 12th Edition)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 254,000 |
| Quaker                  | <p>"The Religious Society of Friends is an Alternative Christianity which emphasizes the personal experience of God in one's life. Quakers understand the necessity of first listening to God before working in the world. They affirm the equality of all people before God regardless of race, station in life, or sex and this belief leads them into a range of social concerns.</p> <p>Being 'Children of Light' they find recourse to violence intolerable. Quaker thought is both mystical (waiting upon God) and prophetic (speaking truth to power). Friends believe that God's revelation is still continuing, that God is not absent or unknowable but that we can find God ourselves and establish a living relationship thus being able to live in the world free from the burden and guilt of sin. It is the search for a closer relationship with God that is the Way.</p> <p>Religious knowledge, like the appreciation of beauty, is not attained by a logical process of thought but by experience and feeling. Quakers maintain that the teaching of Jesus is a practical method for the guidance of the world today, that religion is concerned with the whole of life, and that, beyond a certain point, definition becomes a limitation."<br/> <i>(Website of The Religious Society of Friends, <a href="http://www.quaker.org">www.quaker.org</a>)</i></p> | 217,000 |
| Christian Science       | <p>"The Church of Christ, Scientist, is designed to make the healing and educational system known as Christian Science available and accessible to everyone. Christian Science enables us to understand our relationship to a loving God and our relationship to each other. This understanding improves our bodies, our lives, our communities and the world. The complete explanation of Christian Science is contained in the book <i>Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures</i> by Mary Baker Eddy."<br/> <i>(Website of The Church of Christ, Scientist, <a href="http://www.tfccs.com">www.tfccs.com</a>)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 194,000 |

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| Full Gospel                  | <p>"The Full Gospel movement within Protestant Christianity places special emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in that God wills for his children to be prosperous in all areas of their lives."<br/>(Wikipedia.org, "Full Gospel")</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 168,000 |
| Christian Reform             | <p>"The Christian Reformed Church in North America is a group of nearly a thousand Protestant churches in the United States and Canada. Members of our churches confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior..."</p> <p>The CRC has its family roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Along with the other Protestant churches that emerged out of the Reformation, we believe that we cannot earn our salvation through good works. We also believe-together with John Calvin, one of the leaders of the Reformation-that the Scriptures are the guide by which we evaluate our practices as Christians. So we call ourselves not only 'Protestant' and 'Reformed' but also 'Calvinist'."<br/>(Website of the Christian Reformed Church, www.crcna.org)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 79,000  |
| Independent Christian Church | <p>"The Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ are a part of the Restoration Movement and are in the theological middle ground between the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ (non-instrumental).</p> <p>These churches are best defined as those in the Restoration Movement who have chosen not to be identified with the denomination styled as The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The main difference from the nondenominational churches of Christ is their use of instrumental music...</p> <p>Because the Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ are independent congregations there is no set creed, but The Directory of the Ministry contains the following general description:</p> <p>'Members of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ believe in the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the autonomy of local congregations. Following the basic principles of the 'Restoration Movement,' they accept and teach believers' baptism (immersion) into Christ for the forgiveness of sins; they assemble for worship on the first day of the week, making the observance of the Lord's Supper a focal point in such worship. They seek the unity of all believers on the basis of faith in and obedience to Christ as the divine Son of God and the acceptance of the Bible particularly the New Testament as their all-sufficient rule of faith and practice.'"<br/>(Wikipedia.org, "Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ")</p> | 71,000  |
| Foursquare Gospel            | <p>"The Foursquare Church exists to glorify God and advance His kingdom. Jesus Christ's command is to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations. Therefore, we are 'Dedicated unto the cause of inter-denominational and</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 70,000  |

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|                | <p>worldwide evangelism.' These words express our spirit and our focus.</p> <p>Our call is to preach Jesus Christ, God's Son, as the Savior, Healer, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit and coming King. Our assignment is to develop healthy, growing churches. Our commitment is to plant national churches around the world led by loving servants of Jesus Christ. Churches developed in this manner will reproduce again and again. This makes possible the spread of the gospel to those who have not heard or accepted the message of God's Son...</p> <p>'Foursquare' is a Biblical term used of the tabernacle in the Book of Exodus, of the Temple of the Lord in Ezekiel 40:47, and of Heaven, as described in the book of the Revelation...</p> <p>The name represents the four-fold ministries of Jesus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Savior</li> <li>• The Baptizer with the Holy Spirit</li> <li>• The Healer</li> <li>• The Soon-Coming King"</li> </ul> <p>(Website of the Foursquare Church, <a href="http://www.foursquare.org">www.foursquare.org</a>)</p> |        |
| Fundamentalist | <p>"Fundamentalist Christianity, or Christian fundamentalism is a movement which arose mainly within American Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by conservative evangelical Christians, who, in a reaction to modernism, actively affirmed a 'fundamental' set of Christian beliefs: the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the authenticity of his miracles.</p> <p>The nature of the Christian fundamentalist movement, while originally a united effort within conservative evangelicalism, evolved during the early-to-mid 1900s to become more separatist in nature and more characteristically dispensational in its theology. Most fundamentalists have strongly opposed the Roman Catholic Church for theological reasons; in recent years there has been limited political cooperation between individuals in each group on certain social issues, such as abortion."</p> <p>(Wikipedia.org, "Fundamentalist Christianity")</p>                              | 61,000 |
| Born Again     | <p>Born again is a term used primarily in the Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal branches of Protestant Christianity, where it is associated with salvation, conversion and spiritual rebirth...</p> <p>The idea of being born again carries with it the theological idea that a Christian is a new creation, given a fresh start by the action of God, freed from a sinful past life and able to</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 56,000 |

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|                | <p>begin a new life in relationship with Christ via the Holy Spirit. John Wesley and Christians associated with early Methodism referred to the born again experience as 'the New Birth'.</p> <p>In recent history, born again is a term that has been associated with evangelical renewal since the late 1960s, first in the United States and then later around the world. Associated perhaps initially with Jesus People and the Christian counterculture, born again came to refer to an intense conversion experience, and was increasingly used as a term to identify devout believers."</p> <p>(Wikipedia.org, "Born Again")</p>                                                                                                                    |        |
| Salvation Army | <p>"Salvation Army beliefs follow those of the universal Christian church, as derived from the scriptures. They are included in the 'Articles of War', the membership form which all prospective Salvationists sign before enrolling as Salvation Army soldiers.</p> <p>The Mission Statement of the Salvation Army USA:<br/>The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination."</p> <p>(Website of The Salvation Army, <a href="http://www.salvationarmyusa.org">www.salvationarmyusa.org</a>)</p> | 25,000 |

## Sects vs Cults

### Question: "What is the difference between a sect and a cult?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/sect-cult.html>

Answer: The word sect comes from the Latin word *secta*, which means “school of thought.” It is a subjective term that may apply to a religious faith or denomination, or it may refer to a heretical splinter group. Sometimes, the connotation is one of disapproval, similar to the “destructive heresies” spoken of in 2 Peter 2:1, though there are no consistent or accepted exemplars to use to identify a sect.

Sects are found in all religions. Islam has Sunnis and Shias, Judaism has Orthodox and Karaites, Hinduism has Shivaism and Shaktism, and Christianity has Baptists and Lutherans. These are all examples of religious sects, and they can be thought of as “branches” of different religions. There are also non-religious sects, such as capitalists and socialists among economists, or Freudians and Jungians among psychiatrists.

In contradistinction, the word cult always carries a negative connotation. There are specific criteria used to identify a cult. In *Combating Cult Mind Control*, deprogrammer Steven Hassan singles out what he refers to as “destructive cults,” which he defines as “a pyramid-shaped authoritarian regime with a person or group of people that have dictatorial control. It uses deception in recruiting new members (e.g. people are NOT told up front what the group is, what the group actually believes and what will be expected of them if they become members).” Hassan also correctly points out that cults are not only religious; they may also be commercial or secular in nature.

Hassan developed the BITE acronym, which describes the components employed by destructive cults using mind control. BITE covers the following areas of control:

**Behavior Control:** An individual’s associations, living arrangements, food, clothing, sleeping habits, finances, etc., are strictly controlled.

**Information Control:** Cult leaders deliberately withhold or distort information, lie, propagandize, and limit access to other sources of information.

**Thought Control:** Cult leaders use loaded words and language, discourage critical thinking, bar any speech critical of cult leaders or policies, and teach an “us vs. them” doctrine.

**Emotional Control:** Leaders manipulate their followers via fear (including the fear of losing salvation, fear of shunning, etc.), guilt, and indoctrination.

From a Christian perspective, a cult is any group that follows teachings that contradict orthodox Christian doctrine and promote heresy. Under this definition, the Watchtower Society and the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are both cults.

Because not all cults are immediately recognized as such, and some people may easily confuse cults with sects or denominations, it is critical to follow the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11: “Now the Bereans . . . received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Always research the beliefs of a group before committing to it, examine its behaviors and doctrines in light of the Bible, and beware of the methods listed in the BITE model. Talk to members, but refuse to be coerced by them. Importantly, if something doesn’t seem right, don’t do it.

**Recommended Resources:** *The Kingdom of the Cults*, revised and updated edition and Logos Bible Software.

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/sect-cult.html#ixzz39v2t5Tdi>