

# Many "Worlds" in One

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

If you've ever seen a child develop from early infancy to toddlerhood, you might remember the first time that he or she said the number one and really meant it. That child really believed that everything that could have and does have that label and was truly a unified whole. Looking at a map of the world is pretty astounding also. You look at the map and you see that every inch of the Earth is covered with some representation of a religion. Maybe it is an indigenous religion that emerged from an area or a religion that spread as a result of conquest, colonization, or a combination of both.

In this lesson, you're going to be looking at that and the patterns of the spread of religions around the world. You will also learn what it means in terms of the distribution of religious faith around the globe. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Density and Distribution of Religions](#)
2. [United Nations](#)

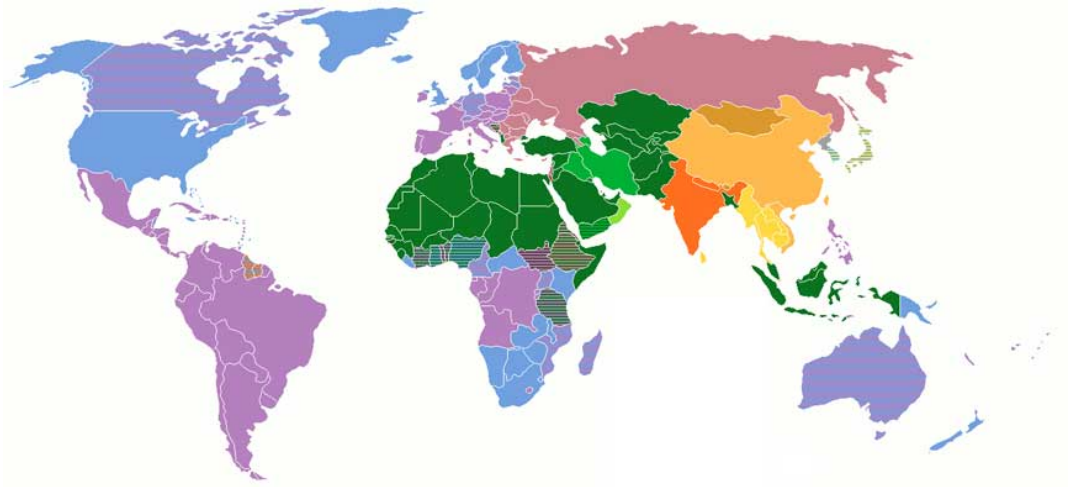
## 1. Density and Distribution of Religions

Take a look at the map below. Here you see the global distribution of the religions of the world. The first thing that stands out is the dense concentration of each. There's a close relationship between geography and religion. This is due to the origin, expansion, and vitality of indigenous religions as well as their spreading to other regions.



### HINT

But it's also important to remember that there is religious diversity all over the world. Many places are home to multiple religions, so parts of this map could be dotted with many colors.



Starting in East Asia, in shades of yellow and gold, Buddhism predominates, especially Mahayana Buddhism in China and Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. In South Asia, Hinduism is represented in orange. There is also a strong Muslim presence, which is not detailed on this map. To the north, in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe and represented in pink, Orthodox Christianity is very widely spread, though many are non-observant and non-practicing. With this map, you have to keep in mind that the 16% categorized as unaffiliated, or nonreligious, are not very well represented. Some of these concentrations on this map are in fact speckled with atheists, agnostics, or otherwise non-religious.

The next thing that might catch your eye is the shades of green, representing Islam. The Middle East is predominantly Muslim, both Sunni and Shia. There are, of course, Jewish and Christian populations as well as some tribal minorities. North Africa is also predominantly, Muslim, as is Indonesia in the Indian Ocean.



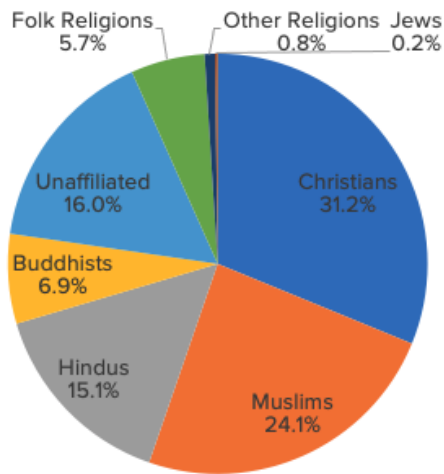
#### DID YOU KNOW

Islam, like many religions, has a long history of conquest with a broad reach. In the 11th century, traders brought the Islamic faith to Indonesia, which is today the largest Muslim country.

The light blue areas represent the Protestant branches of Christianity, and the purple areas show where Catholic Christianity is dominant. Together with Orthodox Christianity, this makes up approximately one-third of the total world population. As you might be able to see, the Americas are overwhelmingly Christian, although many other religions are also practiced here. For example, the indigenous religions are too scant to represent on a general map such as this, but they are still practiced in many tribal communities.

On this map, Western Europe is also cloaked in Christianity. This is to a large extent more of a reflection of its history than the situation today. In general, Western Europe boasts **secularism** in addition to having a majority who are non-practicing. Eastern Europe is also predominantly Christian and generally more practiced than Western Europe. Eastern Europe also has a strong Muslim presence, as does England. However, this fact is also not reflected on this general prevailing religions map.

What is clearly presented here is the broad diversity of religious faiths and traditions around the globe and their concentrations according to geography.



Yet each individual country has its own particular relationship to a common religion. A distant and secular one, such as many countries in Western Europe, or a theocratic one, such as Iran, or it might have a national church, such as the Church of England.

#### DID YOU KNOW

England in fact has more practicing Muslims than Anglicans.

#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Secularism**

The state of being secular or non-religious; the practice of any organization or group that actively rejects the use of religion in its structure, goals, purpose, or organization.

## 2. United Nations

How does it all work as one world? Well, institutions of objective rule and justice, such as the United Nations, exist to help maintain unity. They are supposed to administer this process by maintaining and respecting the religious diversity of its member states while remaining a secular institution operating without preference for religious ideology or belief.



The United Nations Building in New York City.

However, this can mean the United Nations is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Imagine voting on resolutions dealing with anti-defamation of religion, freedom of speech, and the press when it runs against accusations of religious blasphemy.



## SUMMARY

There is a close relationship between geography and religion due to origin and expansion. This affects the **density and distribution of religions** around the world. In Asia, Buddhism and Hinduism predominate, with a strong Muslim presence. Russia and much of Eastern Europe are predominantly Orthodox Christian. The Middle East and North Africa are predominately Muslim with Jewish, Christian, and tribal religions present as well. Christianity makes up the religion of about one-third of the total population and is predominately in the west. In Europe, the western portion is more secular, while the eastern portion is more practiced than in Western Europe. The **United Nations** is an organization that tries to maintain unity in this world by practicing secularism.

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