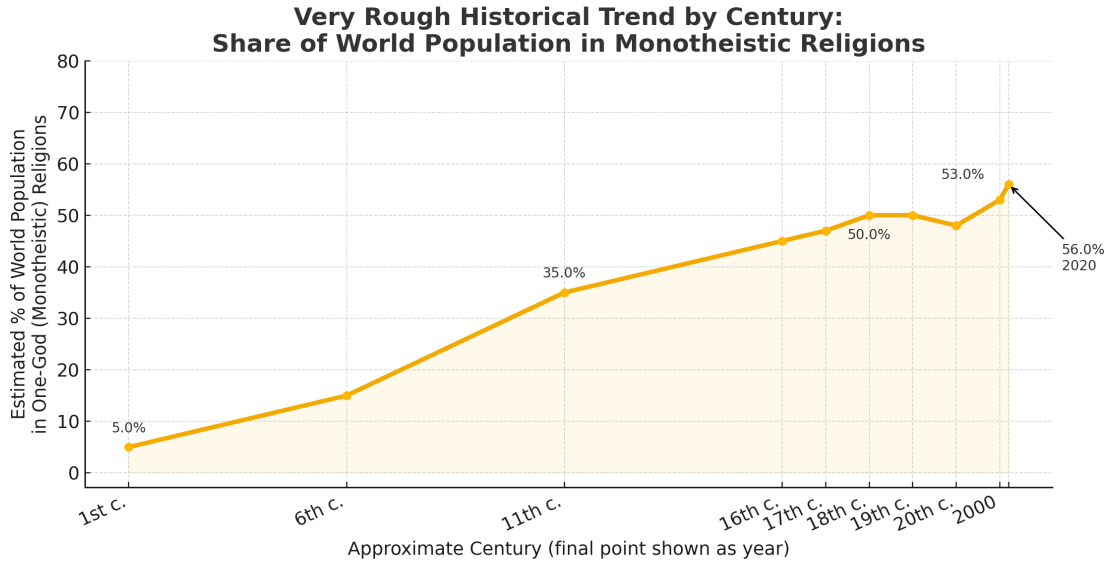


World Religions & Monotheism Overview

Very Rough Historical Trend by Century and Summary of Major Traditions



Illustrative estimates combining Judaism, Christianity (all major branches), Islam, Sikhism, Bahá'í, and smaller monotheistic groups. Modern anchors draw on published demographic studies (e.g., Pew Research Center). Pre-1900 values are approximate. Use for visual/educational purposes only, not precise statistical analysis.

This chart shows a very rough, illustrative estimate of the share of the world's population belonging to one-God (monotheistic) religions—Judaism, the major branches of Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, the Bahá'í Faith, and a number of smaller monotheistic communities—from the 1st century to the present. Values before 1900 are approximate and meant for teaching and visualization, not precise statistical work.

On the following pages, each major religion from the Vows.biz website is summarized in the same order as the site's menu. Within the monotheistic family, Roman Catholicism and other Christian traditions are grouped alongside Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and the Bahá'í Faith. Non-monotheistic or differently theistic traditions are then presented for comparison.

Roman Catholicism

Monotheistic • Christian

Roman Catholicism is the largest branch of Christianity and traces its roots to Jesus and the apostles in the 1st century CE, with a strong institutional shape emerging around the bishop of Rome (the pope) over the first millennium. Catholics believe in one God in three Persons (the Trinity), the divinity, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture and Tradition, and the sacramental life of the Church (with seven sacraments, especially the Eucharist).

The pope and the bishops in communion with him form a teaching authority (the magisterium) that interprets doctrine. Catholicism emphasizes grace, faith, and works, a visible Church, and continuity with the early Christian community. Compared with other religions here, it is distinctively centered on Christ, the sacraments, and a global hierarchical structure led by the pope.

Judaism

Monotheistic

Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions, with roots around 2000–1500 BCE in the ancient Near East. It is traditionally associated with patriarchs like Abraham and Moses (who receives the Law/Torah) rather than a single founder. Jews believe in one God, who made a covenant with Israel. Many of the same scriptures are shared with Christianity (the Jewish Tanakh is largely the Christian Old Testament). Judaism emphasizes the Torah, commandments, and communal life.

Unlike Roman Catholicism, Judaism does not accept Jesus as the Messiah or divine, does not recognize the New Testament or Catholic sacraments, and does not have a centralized authority like the papacy. The focus is on covenantal law, prayer, study, and communal identity, rather than on Catholic doctrines such as the Trinity or salvation through Christ.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Monotheistic • Christian

Eastern Orthodoxy shares a common origin with Roman Catholicism in the early Christian church of the 1st century CE, but the two traditions formally split in the Great Schism of 1054. Orthodoxy has no single pope; instead, it is a family of autocephalous (self-governing) churches led by bishops and patriarchs. It teaches the Trinity, the divinity and resurrection of Jesus, the authority of Scripture and Tradition, and celebrates seven sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

It differs from Catholicism in rejecting papal jurisdiction and infallibility, using somewhat different liturgical practices, and having distinct doctrinal emphases—for example on the “filioque” in the Creed and on some Marian dogmas and views of original sin.

Protestant Christianity

Monotheistic • Christian

Protestantism began in the 16th century CE with reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin reacting to abuses and certain doctrines in Western Catholicism. It is not a single church but a large family of denominations (Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, many Evangelical churches, and more). Most Protestants affirm the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of the Bible, but they emphasize “Scripture alone” (sola scriptura) and “faith alone” (sola fide) as key principles.

Typically they reject papal authority, the Catholic sacramental system (for example, transubstantiation and the full set of seven sacraments), and the requirement of priestly celibacy. Worship is often simpler and more focused on preaching and Bible reading. Compared with Roman Catholicism, Protestant traditions tend to have less centralized authority and a wider range of doctrinal diversity.

Anglican / Episcopalian

Monotheistic • Christian

Anglicanism originates in the 16th century when the Church of England separated from Rome under Henry VIII and was later shaped by both Protestant and Catholic-leaning movements. It combines a liturgical and sacramental life somewhat similar to Catholicism with a distinct structure (archbishops and bishops but no pope). Many Anglicans hold a middle way (“via media”) between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Anglicans affirm the historic creeds and the authority of Scripture but allow more doctrinal diversity. Clergy can marry, and in many provinces women are ordained as priests and bishops. Views on the Eucharist, confession, and some moral questions can be more varied than in Roman Catholicism.

Islam

Monotheistic

Islam arose in the 7th century CE in Arabia. Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad received revelations from God (Allah) that are recorded in the Qur’an, considered the final and complete revelation. Islam is strictly monotheistic: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” It reveres many of the same figures as Judaism and Christianity (Abraham, Moses, Mary, Jesus) but sees Jesus as a prophet, not divine, and rejects the Trinity and the crucifixion as understood in Catholicism.

Islam does not have sacraments or a priesthood in the Catholic sense; instead it emphasizes the Five Pillars (profession of faith, prayer, fasting in Ramadan, almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca) and, in many communities, religious law (sharia) as a guide for personal and social life.

Sikhism

Monotheistic

Sikhism was founded in the late 15th century CE by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of South Asia and developed under nine successive Gurus. Sikhs believe in one, formless God and emphasize devotion to God’s Name, honest work, service, and equality of all people. The Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, is regarded as the eternal Guru.

Sikhism strongly rejects caste distinctions, ritualism, and idolatry. It has no pope or sacramental system like Catholicism and does not accept the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus, though it shares with Catholicism a deep concern for ethical living, charity, and community worship.

Bahá'í Faith

Monotheistic

The Bahá'í Faith began in the 19th century CE in Persia (modern Iran), founded by Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís believe in one God and see religious history as a series of progressive revelations through messengers such as Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í community is organized under an elected body called the Universal House of Justice, not under a pope or bishops.

The Bahá'í Faith reveres Jesus but does not accept Catholic doctrines such as the Trinity, papal infallibility, or the Catholic sacramental system. It places special emphasis on the unity of humanity, gender equality, global justice, and the harmony of science and religion.

Hinduism

Pluralistic / Dharmic

Hinduism is an ancient religious tradition from the Indian subcontinent, with roots at least as far back as the Vedic period (around 1500 BCE) and no single founder. It encompasses a wide variety of beliefs and practices, including devotion to different deities (such as Vishnu, Shiva, or Devi), philosophical schools, and rituals. Hinduism can be seen as polytheistic, henotheistic, or monistic, depending on the strand. It teaches ideas such as karma, reincarnation, and liberation (moksha).

Unlike Roman Catholicism, Hinduism does not have a central magisterium or a single canon interpreted by a pope, and it does not focus on the Trinity or salvation through Christ. It places a strong emphasis on dharma (duty, moral order), family and community rituals, and various paths to spiritual realization.

Buddhism

Dharmic Tradition

Buddhism was founded in the 5th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in northern India. It teaches the Four Noble Truths about suffering and the Eightfold Path as a way to end suffering and achieve enlightenment (nirvana), which is liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Classical Buddhism does not posit a creator God like the Catholic understanding of God and does not center on sin and atonement through Christ.

Instead it emphasizes wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. There are monastic communities, rituals, and scriptures (sutras), but no pope or magisterium equivalent to that of Roman Catholicism. Different branches (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna) have distinct practices and doctrines but share a common goal of awakening and compassion.

Daoism (Taoism)

Chinese Tradition

Daoism emerged in China around the 4th–3rd centuries BCE and is associated with texts like the Daodejing (often linked to Laozi) and the Zhuangzi. Philosophical Daoism emphasizes living in harmony with the Dao (“Way”), a fundamental, ineffable principle underlying reality. Religious Daoism includes temples, rituals, clergy, and practices aimed at health, longevity, and spiritual transformation.

Daoism does not focus on a personal creator God, a Trinity, or sin and salvation as in Catholicism. It instead values naturalness, simplicity, and balance, and has no centralized authority like the papacy.

Confucianism

Ethical / Philosophical

Confucianism is based on the teachings of Confucius (Kongzi), who lived in China in the 6th–5th centuries BCE. It is primarily a system of ethics and social philosophy focused on virtues such as filial piety, humaneness, justice, and ritual propriety. Confucianism has shaped laws, education, and family life in East

Asia.

While it can have religious aspects (such as reverence for ancestors and rituals), it generally does not emphasize a personal God, salvation, or an afterlife in the way Catholicism does. There is no sacramental system or church hierarchy comparable to the Catholic Church; instead, the focus is on moral character and social harmony.

Shinto

Japanese Tradition

Shinto is the indigenous religious tradition of Japan, with very ancient roots and no single founder. It centers on kami, which are spirits or deities associated with nature, ancestors, and particular places. Shinto practices focus on purity, offerings, and rituals at shrines, as well as festivals and rites of passage. It is often practiced alongside Buddhism in Japan.

Shinto is not monotheistic; it involves many kami and does not have a single revealed scripture, a pope, or a doctrinal system like Catholicism. Instead, it emphasizes harmony with nature, community life, and respect for local traditions.

Order of presentation follows the Vows.biz website menu: overview with chart, then monotheistic traditions, followed by other major religious and philosophical traditions for comparison.