

Vatican: Muslims now outnumber Catholics: First time in history

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Although Christianity remains the largest religion worldwide, the Vatican says that Islam has overtaken Roman Catholicism in estimated numbers because of higher birthrates among Muslims.

The Vatican's new 2008 yearbook of statistics, edited by Vittorio Formenti, puts Muslims at 19.2 percent of the world's population and Catholics at 17.4 percent for 2006, the last year with available data.

"For the first time in history we are no longer at the top—the Muslims have overtaken us," Formenti was quoted as saying in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*. The monsignor added that if all Christian groups are considered, then Christians make up 33 percent of the world's population—about 2 billion people.

The Vatican, according to news reports, recently said Catholics number 1.13 billion people. The world Muslim population is often estimated at 1.3 billion, though the data derive from numbers compiled by individual countries and released by the United Nations.

While Muslim families are generally thought to have large families, "Christian ones on the contrary tend to have fewer" children, Formenti said.